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GENDER JUSTICE AND SEXUALITY

Edited by

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A JOURNAL FOR SOCIO-RELIGIOUS RESEARCH

Gender Justice and Sexuality

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Editorial

Gender is a common term applicable to both men and women whereas gender justice very often implicates women, because females are common victims of gender discrimination. Gender justice demands that all human beings, be it men or women, are accorded their dues and that they make choices without the limitations set by gender stereotypes. Their different aspirations should be valued equally and they must be treated fairly according to their respective needs.

It is but a harsh reality that gender justice has not been established in our country. That means, women have been ill-treated for ages in India. It is a paradox that this is a country where women are “worshipped” as *shakti*. But in actuality women are looked down as commodities or as slaves; she is robbed of her dignity and pride inside and outside her home; she occupies little space in the public square; she is considered an object of male sexual enjoyment and reproduction of children. That a couple of women came to occupy topmost political offices in the country means little in terms of the empowerment of large masses of women in the nation.

Gender justice cries against women's dependence on men for their living. It demands greater participation for women in decision making process in domestic as well as social life. It claims that the safety and security of women and girls around the world shall not remain an elusive goal. A nation without the participation of women cannot achieve development. As a matter of happy note, there are many legal and social steps taken to ensure gender justice in the country, including 1997 Supreme Court Guidelines on “sexual harassment in work place for prevention and protection of women.” But in general they are insufficient and inadequate to meet the goal.

As far as Christians are concerned, gender justice is a matter of their faith and therefore a subject of theological reflections. That is why this issue of *Jeevadhara* dedicates itself to certain theological and social dimensions of gender justice. The first essay by Julie George SSpS unveils the gravity of domestic violence against women. It is a ubiquitous but seldom talked about issue. She claims that it is not merely a personal misbehavior of certain men against women. Closer examination, according to her, reveals that it is a battle declared on women to achieve a range of direct control that include masculine supremacy, religious hierarchism, communal reyenge, caste subjugation and political mileage.

Prem Xalxo SJ in his contribution raises certain concrete questions such as are the media really responsible for gender-based violence? Do the media present a distorted version of socio-cultural and ethical life as far as the gendered crimes are concerned? The context of this analysis is the purported correlation between media and objectification of women. Stanislaus Alla SJ in his contribution traces the 'presence' of women at Vatican II. He states that on the one hand, the presence of women at the Council was historic - even though symbolic- and their contribution was limited to the commissions, and, on the other hand, one could still see in the reluctance to invite or let married women in traces of perceptions that consider woman as polluting or tempting or their participation was unnecessary at theological deliberations. Matthew Coutinho in his article examines *Mulieris Dignitatem* letter of Pope John Paul II on the Dignity and Vocation of Women in order to draw out focal points that need to enter the discourse on gender justice.

Thomas Srampickal makes a scientific study on the etiology of homosexuality - one of the strongly debated issues in relation to sexuality and gender determination. He examines various theories and alludes to their relevant ethical implications. I believe that this work will serve as a source material for serious study on the morality of homosexuality in the future.

Gender justice will not be established overnight in any country. It demands a lot of cultural and political preparations. Theological reflections also can contribute much to this ongoing process. This issue of *Jeevadhara* represents such a modest attempt.

Mathew Illathuparampil

Domestic Violence and Indian Mindset

Julie George

One of the areas where women are consistently being oppressed with is their homes. When faced with domestic violence, women become less resistant, supported by few people and often recognized by none. This article explores the breadth, width and consequences of the ground reality of domestic violence in India. The author, Julie George, is a lawyer who acts on behalf of poor women in Pune. She is the secretary of the Women Religious Lawyers' Forum associated with Streevani, an NGO that aims to contribute to the creation of a gender just society through facilitating a process of empowerment.

Every woman who comes to me has a story, a story of physical, verbal, emotional, mental, economic or sexual abuse, pain and humiliation. Daily we hear from the media, narrating the sordid story of rape, domestic violence and various abuse of cases and the humiliating experiences of women across the country. Our women are living these horror stories from Mathura to Shakti Mills Survivor. In our misogynistic cultural environment many men look at women as lesser beings, commodities and play things. Therefore domestic violence against women is not just an assault, but it is with the intention of sending out a set of strong messages that can speak not just through the personal ordeal of what the woman will go through but by the visible and lasting signs on her body as well. The only way to understand the nature of these happenings is to say that this is a battle declared on women to achieve a range of direct control that include masculine supremacy, religious hierarchism, communal revenge, caste subjugation and political mileage etc. Can there be a future where today's young girls will grow up to become mature women and lead a life without encountering such dramatic tales?

The Image of an Ordinary Woman

The focus of this paper is domestic violence and its consequence for an ordinary woman. We need an image of an ordinary woman, if we have to negotiate a space of equality and dignity for her. Four out of ten women in India still have no say in their marriage, eight out of ten need permission to visit a doctor, six out of ten practice some form of head covering. These are among the findings of a major new large-scale sample survey shared exclusively with *The Hindu*.¹ In every way woman's autonomy remains severely constrained. "Let us visualize the Ordinary Woman. The Ordinary Woman gets up early and cooks for the family. She packs food for the children and her husband. If she works at home, her strenuous chores begin thereafter. If she works outside she goes by public transport and does not want to be touched or mauled or leered at on the way. She comes home all tired but generally an Ordinary Woman's husband does not share the house work. So she begins the chores at home till she is ready to drop asleep. She wishes to be cordial and friendly with others without being suspected of adultery. She is not a compulsive liar. She does not readily go to court. If she does, it is only because she is aggrieved. She does not complain about her marriage or her husband unless pushed to it. She knows that she will be a burden on her natal family if she returns. She also knows that if she comes out of the marriage she will suffer economic disadvantage. So she puts up with a lot of suffering being aware of her life's reality. She does not want to be abused. She deserves to be safe at home and outside. She deserves to be treated with dignity. She deserves a full life. Is that too much to ask?"²

"A girl who is 30 years old, and still not married, is an old maid. A man who is 90 years old and not married, is a catch" said Joan Rivers in 1967. To demean women has been a national pastime. Politicians speak routinely. These men have seen masculine models subjugating women all their lives. We need to recognize that violence against women is a

¹ <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/many-women-have-no-say-in-marriage/article5801893>. accessed on October 7, 2014

² Prabha Sridevan, *In search of an Ordinary Woman*: The paragraph is excerpted from her keynote address on August 11, 2013 at a conference by the Majlis Legal Centre: see <http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-opinion/in-search-of-the-ordinary-woman/article5223592>. accessed on September 29, 2014.

disease that has become endemic in our culture. Today for women life is never safe, everything is possible at any time, on a spectrum from lascivious look to rape and murder. There needs to be a transformation inside the home, in schools, in communities,” Suneeta Dhar, Director of Jagori told *The Hindu*. The older generation still approve that women need to suffer but today’s young women feel that they cannot take it anymore. Our society contributes to domestic violence by not taking a stand or not taking it seriously enough and by treating it as expected, normal or deserved.

Unequal power relations

Domestic violence and abuse are used for one purpose and one purpose only: to gain and maintain total control over the victim. Violence against women is a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women, which have led to domination over and discrimination against women by men and to the deterrence of the full progress of women. Justice Verma committee report says: “This brings us to the vexed question that unless and until the state pursues a policy of avowed determination to be able to correct a historical imbalance in consciousness against women, it will not be possible for men and indeed women themselves, to view women differently and through the prism of equality.” After massive campaign and lobbying, the women managed to get The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005. The Act provides for more effective protection of the rights of women guaranteed under the Constitution who are victims of a series of violence such as physical (beating, slapping, hitting, kicking, pushing), sexual (forced intercourse, forcing her to look at pornography or any other obscene pictures or material and child sexual abuse), verbal (name-calling and insults), psychological and economic (preventing one’s wife from taking up a job and not maintaining the wife and children) and emotional abuse of any kind occurring within the family. Domestic violence under the Act also includes harassment by way of unlawful dowry demands to the women. It empowers the women to stay in the matrimonial home or shared household whether or not she has any title in the household.

Efficacy of the legal framework

The justice system treats domestic violence as a domestic dispute and not as a crime. “Community usually doesn’t ostracize domestic

abusers, clergy or counselors may have the attitude that the relationship needs to be improved and that the relationship can work, given more time and effort. People may have the attitude that the abuse is the fault of the victim or abuse is a normal part of marriage or domestic partnership and gender role socialization and stereotypes condone abusive behavior by men.”³ Many women stay on in their abusive marriage and get beaten up by their husbands rather than be out on their own where they have no safety and in all probability any men could assault them.

Many cry foul about the misuse of law. When a woman asks for her sustenance, how can it be abuse of law? When a woman asks for protection from domestic violence, how does it become misuse of law? On 3rd July, 2014 the Supreme Court ruled that “Section 498A is used as a weapon by disgruntled wives” in *Arnesh Kumar v. State Of Bihar*.⁴ Such words are amplified manifold across the Country. It is particularly disturbing because these are not ordinary folks who may be excused on the ground of their ignorance, but these are people whose voices have a capacity to influence and shape opinion. Often the reality is poles apart. Incidentally as all studies show, only a fraction of domestic violence cases ever reach the police station and even fewer get proper justice. “Crime in India 2012 Statistics” published by National Crime Records Bureau, Ministry of Home Affairs records that the cases of cruelty and dowry harassment filed under Section 498A of Indian Penal Code accounts for 4.5% of total crimes committed under different sections of Penal Code. The rate of charge-sheeting in cases is as high as 93.6%, while the conviction rate is only 15%, which is lowest across all heads. Section 498-A of the Indian Penal Code was introduced with definite object to combat the menace of harassment to a woman at the hands of her husband and his relatives. The fact that Section 498-A is a cognizable and non-bailable offence has lent it a dubious place of pride amongst the provisions that are used as weapons rather than shield by disgruntled wives, says Justice Chandramauli Kr. Prasad. The reasons for acquittals in the cases registered under 498A are many and it would be precarious

³ Suman Rai, *Law Relating to Protection of Women from Domestic Violence*, New Delhi: Orient Publishing Company, 2008.

⁴ *Arnesh Kumar Vs State of Bihar*, indiankanoon.org/doc/2982624/ accessed on October 8, 2014

to equate acquittals with “false” cases. There are enough laws in the country to prosecute the perpetrators, but that the authorities come up short in implementation. Hence the Supreme Court's approach does little to protect genuine victims other than diluting the socially necessary laws. A man who does not abuse women and has no malice need not fear about Sexual Harassment at Work Place Act, 498A of IPC or any other law.

Often the law which is equal and fair in paper, is not all fair when implemented, and that is something we don't recognise easily. Normally the law comes into the picture only when a woman is abandoned, beaten up severely or killed. We see many contradictory opinions from the Courts on cases under domestic violence. At one level we talk of zero tolerance to violence, but on the other it is all mediation and settlement in the family matters to save the institution of marriage. In 2009, a bench of Justices S.B.Sinha and Cyriac Joseph in *Bhaskar Lal Sharma and Anr. v. Monica*⁵ ruled that the mother in law kicking her daughter in law with her leg and calling her mother a liar may come under some other offence, but not one that is punishable for cruelty under 498A. While an ordinary man is viewed sympathetically, an ordinary woman is viewed with suspicion, says Justice Prabha Sridevan, a former Judge of Madras High Court. However today, any woman who is desirous of initiating proceedings under this section immediately becomes a suspect in the eyes of the law.

“Women get violated, then blames or guilt tripped for the violation. We are violated, and then made to feel responsible for it. That is the genius of Patriarchy. Part of resistance is refusing the shame, refusing the guilt, refusing the stigma, giving it back to the perpetrator” says Eve Ensler, the writer of *Vagina monologues*.⁶ What is the meaning of affection? Asks a lawyer during the cross examination to a woman who filed a case under domestic violence Act against her husband who ill treated her and ignored her completely during the initial days of marriage onwards. The woman though frightened recounted her early days as a married woman with her husband and the humiliation she had to go

⁵ *Bhaskar Lal Sharma and Anr. Vs Monica*, 2009 (10) SCC 604.

⁶ An interview published in *Times of India*, Crest Edition, January 5, 2013

through. For a woman facing the trial is a challenging task and requires great mental preparation. Some male lawyers become so malicious to the victims of violence and try to intimidate them and this is usually done to distract the woman and to make her lose her focus and alertness.

The nature of legal language

The legal language currently used is terribly Patriarchal, it looks at “modesty” as something to be guarded⁷. The Indian Penal Code Section 354 speaks about outraging the modesty of a woman. The meaning of modesty according to Oxford Dictionary is dressing or behaving so as to avoid impropriety or indecency, especially to avoid attracting sexual attention”. Accordingly any woman who is not dressed up according to the norms of ‘moral police’ will turn out to be part of the problem and she seems to be attracting attention. For example the recent comment by K.J.Yesudas, the great singer, “What should be covered must be covered. Women should not trouble others by wearing jeans, when women wear jeans; people are tempted to pay attention to what is beyond it, thus forcing them to do undesirable things. They [women] should not try to become like men but must behave modestly.” Though the comment invited protests from political leaders, women’s groups and the public, most men and even some women will reflect this same attitude.

The legal language not only betrays lack of empathy for the victim but also shows distinct gender insensitivity and influence of Patriarchy. The reasonable and fair provisions that are provided in the law for women on various reliefs such as alimony, maintenance, custody etc. leaves enough scope for gender-sensitive judgments. “But the sympathy of the Judges is often for the man, and the woman is condemned to be traumatized for life. In other words, however objective the learned judges may have tried to be, in a largely patriarchal society, a greater amount of kindness is given to the male.”⁸ Especially if the man succeeds in portraying the woman in a very bad light and says she drinks and smokes, everyone from the Judge to the lawyers and all present in the court room will

⁷ Kim Arora “To Hell with Modesty,” *Times of India*, Crest Edition January 19, 2014.

⁸ Julie George “Your Honour! Where is Her Honour?” *A Study of Misogynist Court Rulings*, Living Nirbhaya Pathways to Violence free Church and Society, Streevani and Montfort Social Institute Publication, 2014.

believe him. What about a man who is an alcohol addict and beats his wife daily?

Rape within marriage: boundaries blurred

There was a strong demand to include marital rape as a criminal offence, supported by the Justice Verma Committee Report. The Politicians greeted this demand with such hostility, under the pretence of claiming to protect the integrity of the Indian family. Even the law does not view forcible sex within the four corners of marriage as rape by the husband. This is based on the patriarchal notion of a woman being the husband's property, donated to him at the time of marriage. To begin with, marital rape happens when consent to sexual intercourse is not given within the context of a marriage. Our society infer that a wife is always presumed to consent to sexual intercourse with her husband as long as they are not separated by an order of the Court, or a separation agreement, or grant of nullity, or the husband is not subject to an injunction not to interfere with his wife. A universal assumption in a patriarchal society is that the woman's body is male property. Some legal experts believe the government is reluctant to criminalize marital rape because it would require them to tweak laws based on religious practices. Denial of sex to the husband, according to traditional beliefs, goes against the duties of an ideal wife. Indian personal laws, be it Hindu, Muslim or Christian, are conservative and gendered in favour of the husband.

Rape including marital rape is a crime of violence, not of sex. Many women assume that men can force them to have sex against their will, and many men continue to act as if they have the right. In one of my cases which is sub judice, the husband has abandoned his wife and two minor children for the past two years, but still demands his conjugal rights. Our laws of crime, evidence and punishment fails to provide equal protection from rape to all women. "While rape by a stranger gets clearly defined as rape, rape by a spouse has its boundaries blurred. Marital rape is often part and parcel of an abusive, dysfunctional relationship."⁹ This argument is opposed fiercely by women's groups. Lord Keith, said, in 1992 that "Marriage is in modern times regarded as a partnership of

⁹ See <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/House-panel-backs-move-not-to-treat-marital-rape-as-sexual-offence/articleshow/18759230.cms> (accessed on December 28, 2013).

equals, and no longer one in which the wife must be the subservient chattel of the husband.”¹⁰ Prof. Sandra Fredman of the University of Oxford asserts that “marriage should not be regarded as extinguishing the legal or sexual autonomy of wife.”

Our Judges are not exactly famous for their commitment to gender justice. They ignore women’s inherently disadvantageous bargaining position with respect to men, which leads to equality only on paper and not equity. Justice Rohatgi’s pronouncement in *Harvinder Kaur v. Harmander Singh*¹¹ is a classic example of misogyny. He says “Introduction of constitutional law in the home is the most inappropriate. It is like introducing a bull in a china shop.... In the privacy of the home and the married life neither Article 21 nor Article 14 has any place. While it is a laudable duty to champion women’s equality in the public sphere, it would be betrayal to even contemplate extending the same to the sacred precincts of the private sphere- that is, the home and the family.” This has gone down in Indian judicial wisdom as demonstrating the law’s dichotomous hypocrisy towards women’s rights.

There is no comprehensive definition of what comprises of marital and non marital property in India. Marriage laws differ between communities. Family Law of Goa confirms that the mere existence of a legal code does not guarantee equality and fairness but the law is being supported by Bharatiya Janata Party who claim it is India’s only uniform civil law, applicable to all citizens regardless of religious difference. Currently in India different religious groups are governed by so-called personal laws that regulate matrimonial issues. The BJP had in its election manifesto promised to implement a Uniform Civil Code, applicable to all citizens. “It’s strange that these 19th-century colonial laws are consistently lauded, because they are far from equal, or even capable of coping with contemporary requirements.”¹²

Some provisions of the Goa Civil Code are very progressive. For example, the Property Law, which guarantees immediately upon betrothal

¹⁰ *R v R* [1992] 1 A.C. 599, House of Lords, <http://www.leeds.ac.uk/law/hamlyn/rvr.htm> (accessed on July 5, 2014).

¹¹ *Harvinder Kaur vs Harmander Singh Choudhry*, AIR 1984 Delhi 66.

¹² See <http://scroll.in/article/666255/Goa's-Civil-Code-has-backing-of-BJP,-but-it's-not-truly-Uniform> (accessed on October 7, 2014).

each spouse 50% of all assets owned and due to be inherited at the time of marriage. Even there too these property rights often exist only on paper. Often, daughters get a certain amount of gold at the time of their marriage and are asked to sign off their rights to the family property, unless the woman is aware of her rights and asks for it. We know that mere existence of a law does not bring about equality in social relations for instance the Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961. In spite of the prevalence of the Act for many years, accepting and giving of dowry continues to be a common practice among all religions and in all strata of society. The dowry system has been a great evil, so many cases of burns, homicides, and suicides are being reported, due to the fact the dowry was not given according to the expectation of husband and his family. As I was putting down this article, a bereaved father approached us saying that on 25th September, 14 just a week ago he lost his young daughter, a mother of two minor children to dowry harassment, she hanged herself. Though the institution of marriage is greatly revered in this country, there is phenomenal increase in domestic violence in recent years.

Behind every successful wife, a resentful husband?

We say that behind every successful man, there is a wise wife, and behind every successful wife, a resentful husband?¹³ This seems to have been the story of many of our artistic and talented women. Annapurna Devi, the first wife of Late Pandit Ravi Shankar, who had sacrificed her career for her famous husband revealed that “I look at the world and I notice it is turning, while my sitar gently weeps.” Unfortunately her sacrifice could not save her marriage. Some say he did not allow her to perform in public, so her fame wouldn’t dwarf his.

The relationship between gender, sexuality, and religion within contemporary Indian society is complex and controversial. Women, sexual minorities, dalits, among others, face various forms of oppression. Tradition and religion are often evoked to justify such discrimination. There has been a recent surge of deliberation and public discourse around gender, identity, and sexuality; various prominent public figures, such as politicians and faith leaders, have made statements both condemnatory and supportive in nature. However, very few have been involved in frank

¹³ Marriage of inconvenience – *Times of India* Editorial on September 6, 2014 page 12.

and open discussions on the matter. “The current love jihad campaign taps into the anxieties of a patriarchal society where women are asserting themselves in matters of love and marriage.”¹⁴ A woman deciding her own life and marriage is seen as a threat in patriarchal societies. It is easy to attribute communal colour to a woman’s choices with regard to her life and to control her. This shows the anxiety about women standing up for their rights. Today women’s aspirations are changing and the gender demarcation is also changing.

Subjugation of women is a humanitarian issue and not only just a women’s issue and needs to be dealt with as such. We have to involve and work with men. Engaging men in this process will help reach, teach and change other men. Men in prominence and power need to use their power to effect positive change for women. One of the huge impediments is religion. Enormous atrocities are committed against women in the name of religion, many misunderstanding about women and their role in the society comes from the misinterpretation of religion and religious practices. We need to question religious customs just enough to see whether they are hampering the progress of women. The Personal laws of different religious communities are not giving adequate justice to women. The subordinate status of women combined with socio cultural norms that are prone towards patriarchy and masculinity can be considered as an important factor in determining violence against women. Domestic violence or intimate partner violence encompasses all acts of violence against women within the context of family or intimate relationships and it has negative effects not only on the woman but on all family members especially children. Further it can be stated that domestic violence is purely a form of gender based violence.

Conclusion

We need Un-Silencing says Jasvinder Sanghera in her book ‘Daughters of Shame’. She also talks about the need for women to not just recognize and name this betrayal, but to speak out openly about it. She says, “I have also tried to batter down the wall of secrecy. *I realized that by*

¹⁴ Charu Gupta, *Love Jihad is Insidious: the Fear Seeps into the Home, the Bedroom*, *Times of India*, August 31, 2014 page 17.

staying silent, women like me were making it impossible for anyone to help and I wanted to change that.” It was however not easy, and Jasvinder talks about how it isolated her from the Indian community, and often left her feeling alone and very vulnerable. “Domestic violence is undoubtedly a human right issue and serious deterrent to development. The phenomenon of domestic violence is widely prevalent but often invisible in the public domain.

Romano and Mavis Pirola, the first married couple to address the Family Synod which is in session from 5th October to 15th October, 2014 about the reality of married life, told the Synod Father’s that “family life is messy”. They presented the situations of the many Catholic’s who experience brokenness and tension in their family life. Divorced, abandoned, exploited, oppressed or abused women are not a uniform group: each one has her individual background, circumstances, faith journey and ways of interaction with the Church and society

Gender equality between sexes entails the understanding that all humans are equal, and are free to develop their personal abilities and make choices without being controlled by the stereotypes, and rigid boundaries created by the society. The sacrifice and sufferings of thousands of women in our Country only reinforces that India requires de facto equality, requires freedom from violence, superstition, misogynist traditions and practices which are completely at variance with the Constitution. We need to focus on our own family, community, village, city and Country and fight for violence against women to end - Perhaps it is a collection of violence – physical, sexual economic. We need to fight it in solidarity with our community and each small victory will give us the energy to do more.

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Pursuit of Gender Justice and Equality in Mass Media

Prem Xalxo

Very often many people blame the media for their role in presenting women as objects of sex, pleasure and dominance. Are the media really responsible for gender-based violence? Do the media present a distorted version of socio-cultural and ethical life as far as the gendered crimes are concerned? These questions are addressed by Prem Xalxo, professor of moral theology at Gregorian University, Rome. He concludes in his study that the media can play a pivotal role in bringing about an efficacious and lasting change in the way gendered justice is perceived and interpreted and thus, help remove the institutional, socio-cultural system of privilege, discrimination and oppression based on gender.

On 12 June 2014, the official song of the FIFA World Cup 2014 *We Are One* was presented by Pitbull, Jennifer Lopez and Claudia Leitte during the inaugural function held in Rio de Janeiro. There was an all evident difference in the way the protagonists presented themselves and the song itself. Pitbull was wearing a Brazilian Team Jersey and a white sports' trouser, whereas Jennifer and Claudia danced with him provocatively in their scanty dresses. Both Jennifer and Claudia seemed to be extremely happy and content with their performance; and so too were the organizers and the spectators. But for the success of the show, was it the only way to present the female singers by making them dressed to kill – attractive, sexy and seductive? Were the media responsible for evidencing such gender differences? Commenting on the unfolding events of the final day, Sagarika Ghose, a senior journalist of *The Times of India* (Mumbai) had written on the editorial page, “At the riveting final,

surely the sport's most testing moment, TV cameras veered off to female legs and midriffs. Male competition on the field was accompanied by a dazzling array of female deshabille off it, raising the question – why does male-dominated contact sport, fuelled by war-like nationalist aggression need to be supported by ostentatious female sexuality?"¹ The similar questions resonate every time the media present the glamorous, elegant and sensual female bodies to sell various commodities and thus, promote the attitude "sex sells".

On 16 December 2012, a 23-year-old female physiotherapy intern was gang-raped and fatally assaulted in a bus on-the-road. After struggling for her life for thirteen days from the fatal injuries inflicted on her, she died in Singapore while undergoing emergency treatment. The media played a vital role in disseminating the news and generating widespread outrage and condemnation both in India and abroad. There was a succession of news reporting of rape cases around the country after the Delhi gang-rape case as if the floodgates of sexual crimes were suddenly opened. Were there no cases of rape prior to the Delhi incidence? Definitely, yes; but now the media have been playing a prominent role in bringing to the fore such incidences immediately even from the remotest areas. Some irresponsible statements made by various political leaders after almost every incident of rape demonstrated the psyche of the patriarchal Indian society, which invariably blames women for the sexual abuse and violence on them. Many were quick to blame the media for their role in presenting women as objects of sex, pleasure and dominance. Are the media really responsible for gender-based violence? Do the media present a distorted version of socio-cultural and ethical life as far as the gendered crimes are concerned?

The immediate answer to such questions could be both Yes and No. Most of the media machinery is run by men and it seems natural to them to reproduce and portray habitually, systematically and continuously the unequal gendered social relationships within a particular society, culture and community. It is often said that the media are the mirrors of a society. They represent and reproduce socio-cultural, ethical and historical realities

¹ Sagariika Ghose, "Breasts, Balls and Goals. How Women have become Second-class Citizens in the Republic of Football" in *The Times of India*, Mumbai (22 July 2014) 14.

of that particular society, whether those realities are traditional and static or progressive and dynamic. That is why they seem to perpetuate stereotype images of sex and gender. There are also some who insist that “contrary to popular opinion, media are not windows on the world, nor are they even mirrors reflecting the real world. What they are, in truth, are carefully manufactured cultural products”.² There is no doubt that those who own and control the media have the final word on what has to be presented or transmitted to the public. However, it is also true that the media cannot exist or survive in a vacuum; they exist and survive within a particular society by reproducing its way of life, culture and traditions. That is why whatever may be the interests of the owners of the media, they cater basically what the public desires to hear, read and view.

Today with the quantum growth of social networks, the role of the media has taken a giant leap moving beyond the limits of time and space. They touch every aspect and value of socio-cultural and ethical domain and leave a lasting impact on human life. They have the potential to manipulate people’s attitude and opinions by disseminating certain type of news and information. Even though they make a major contribution towards fostering a tolerant multicultural, multi-religious and multiethnic society, their role in perpetuating the gender bias and gendered injustice is always under scrutiny.

Gender Based Issues in the Media: Raising Social Consciousness

Media are the powerful tools to form public consciousness and raise issues that violate the right and dignity of a person based on sex and gender. Even though the media reflect the dominant socio-cultural and religious traditions, practices and beliefs, they often go off the track to raise some social evil or malpractices and force the public to sit back and reflect on some serious issues. The episodes of *Satyamev Jayate* produced by Amir Khan could be an edifying example of such efforts. Many have used the social forum of the media to publicize and raise consciousness for the use of the gender neutral forms of nouns and

² ELIZABETH THOMAN – TESSA JOLLS, “Media Literacy – A National Priority for a Changing World,” *American Behavioral Scientist* 48/18 (2004) 25.

pronouns in addressing or presenting social relationships. The media have the wings to carry one concrete effort from one place to the other with a lightening speed through the social network and mobilize people for a cause. It is true that the Indian tradition of patriarchal and feudal system has played a major role in the perpetuation of the gendered social structures and practices that have resulted in continuing serious injustices to women. In recent years, media have successfully created awareness of such injustice done to women, but menfolk do not wish to lose the gender based privileges.

One of the sincere initiatives has been noted in the CTEWC (Catholic Theological Ethics in the World Church) guidelines for the articles, which lays clear emphasis on using an all-inclusive language. Such efforts force a writer to reflect consciously or unconsciously on his or her contribution towards gender justice. It has to be noted, however, that the serious efforts to provide a gender-neutral alternatives sometimes fail to confront the fact that the human race consists of persons of two sexes with some socially relevant physical differences between women and men, with different social roles in all human societies. The gender-neutral terms frequently “obscure the fact that so much of the real experience of ‘persons’, so long as they live in gender-structured societies, *does* in fact depend on what sex they are.”³ Indeed, if both the genders are treated equally with justice and dignity, the question of using neutral terms will lose its relevance. With the expansion of social networking, the media have been playing a pivotal role in creating social consciousness to stop gendered violence, injustice and discrimination.

Critical Appraisal of Advertisements

The advertisements are the primary sources of revenue for sustaining media operations. It is not an exaggeration to state that the media is controlled by the advertisers and the sponsors, whose primary interest is to sell their products by every possible method, trick and seduction. That is why the advertisements pervade every aspect of human life and reinforce inequality and gender-based stereotypes. They create “myth and construct

³ SUSAN M. OKIN, *Justice, Gender and the Family*, Basic Books, Inc., New York 1989, 10-11.

icons and dominant images as the model to follow, the leader to emulate. Brand ambassadors beam and seduce and the readers become willing or unwilling accomplices.”⁴ They create needs – genuine and false – and inject them in the veins of the public leaving them perplexed, because the way those needs are projected to people makes them feel that without satisfying those needs, the human life would be incomplete.

In such mad rush of creating needs and selling products, women are the worst victims who are depicted in various forms to attract an unassuming customer. Sometimes, a woman is portrayed in traditional roles who has to take care of all household articles, appliances and utensils, care products, cosmetics, clothes and food items. The other times, she is portrayed as a person who has to please and seduce others, especially men. She becomes the subject to men’s sexual fantasies and desires. She needs to dye her hair to look young, attractive and seductive; she must lose weight by a proper dieting; she has to wear tight miniskirts and look beautiful to serve better as an air hostess; she has to stand smiling before the new models of cars – all these are the indispensable parts of the advertisement strategies. In fact, the advertisers sponsor only those programs or shows that can create or expand markets for their products. Often, male voice is used to sell the products to women, which reinforces the cultural view that men are competent authorities. Such depictions imply that advertising not only consolidates but also continues to construct gender inequalities.

Advertisements are so pervasive that they leave tremendous impact on the socio-cultural values. The advertising “objectifies people, turning them into things – things that we learn to love in place of people.”⁵ By objectifying both men and women, they set the standard for what they should look like. They portray attractive and muscular physique of men as ideal masculine body, whereas a beautiful, fair, slim and seductive body of women is presented as the ideal feminine physique. Such portrayal forces the persons outside those categories to perceive their bodies as

⁴ SANJUKTA DASGUPTA – et al., *Media, Gender, and Popular Culture in India*, Sage Publication, New Delhi 2012, 131.

⁵ PAMELA CREEDON – JUDITH CRAMER, *Women in Mass Communication*, Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks 2007, 99.

abnormal, unattractive and unacceptable. For example, the all-fairness creams for men and women are doing a great business because being fair is presented as key to success and the standard of being beautiful and attractive. Similarly grey hair is natural with the growing age, but the impact of advertising is such that most of the grey-haired persons dye their hair to look younger and smarter. There are no dearth of examples to prove that the media plays a major role through the advertisements in perpetuating the gendered injustice and discrimination.

Stereotyping the Gendered Roles

Gendered roles have been part and parcel of every culture and civilization. By its nature, human race consists of persons of two sexes with well-demarcated socio-cultural and traditional roles and degrees of authority and opportunity. The Book of Genesis depicts a vivid description of the gendered social roles after the fall of Adam and Eve. Adam is condemned to work hard in the field to survive, "By the sweat of your face shall you get bread to eat" (Gen 3:19). The birth pang of Eve is intensified indicating her role as life giver, "I will intensify the pangs of your childbearing; in pain shall you bring forth children. Yet your urge shall be for your husband, and he shall be your master" (Gen 3:16). With the gradual growth of culture and civilization, the gender roles took concrete and specific forms according to the need and context of a society.

Almost in all human societies, masculinity is identified with physical strength, dominance, independence, aggression, adventure and fearlessness; whereas femininity is associated with tenderness, beauty, dependence and timidity. The terms fatherly and motherly are easily comprehensible in terms of their specific roles and functions in a family. Although the gendered roles portrayed by the media are in no way different from what they exist in different societies and cultures, the problem arises when the same media try to stereotype both men and women in ways that limit the perception of human possibilities and potential. There exist various possibilities of depicting women in different roles, such as women carrying out successfully some of the roles played by men in work places and public relations. But the media continue to project their images as beautiful, dependent, sex objects, beautiful,

submissive, domineering who devote most of their time and energy in taking care of their appearance, and above all, as physically weaker than men. The dominant-subordinate patterns of male-female relationship often become the central theme of the entertainment in the media as it is evident in cinemas and television soap operas. It is a paradox that the very qualities, such as, beauty consciousness, timidity, courteousness and dependence, which are required in order to meet the feminine ideals of a particular society, contribute to their victimization. The aggressiveness and dominance, considered to be masculine ideals are identical to those linked to abuse women. Unfortunately, the media choose to swim along the currents of a society in showing the stereotypical gendered roles and thus, perpetuate them.

Globalization of Indifference

Pope Francis has used the term *Globalization of Indifference* in his recent Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* to describe the total indifference of the larger human society toward the poor and the marginalized, which is substantiated in human incapability of “feeling compassion at the outcry of the poor, weeping for other people’s pain, and feeling a need to help them, as though all this were someone else’s responsibility and not our own” (*Evangelii Gaudium* 54). As far as the mainstream media are concerned, poor, marginalized and rural public are virtually non-existent or unimportant for them. They are represented only when they are victims of brutality, violence and natural calamities. If they are not seen and heard on the media, their cry of despair is not heard by the rich, affluent and ruling class, and their desperate situations remains obscured. In the similar lines, older people are systematically and consistently ignored by the media, because being young, beautiful, energetic and healthy is the criteria of happiness in the present society. The media portray the older people as sick, dependent, passive and always complaining. Such distorted depiction of the older generation disseminate the message that the older people are less important and burden to the society.

Majority of the poor and marginalized Indian population lives in India and unfortunately, the rural India has virtually and systematically disappeared from the media. It appears only when there are disasters,

natural calamities, protests against land grabs by the multinationals or some untoward incidents like some ridiculous decisions by the social bodies, such as Khap Panchayats. The continuing poverty, illiteracy, inequality and vulnerability of most sections of rural men and women have been completely erased from the screen and from the consciousness of globalized India⁶. Sometimes the portrait of traditional family women presented merely out of curiosity and entertainment, and not for real interest in gaining knowledge or improving their life situation.

Indian Scenario

India is a country where there are more mobile phones than toilets. People are connected to one another and to the world outside through mobile phones and Internet. The recent news of the rapes, violence, abuse and atrocities on women taking place one after the other in quick succession have reached immediately to the general public, which seem to be bewildered and bemused. The question being asked is, "What is wrong with the Indian psyche?" The answer may be baffling to many Indians, because the sex crimes have been committed for centuries without being noticed in the absence of any proper forum to spread the news. Although many blame the media for the increase in sexual crimes on women; the cases are coming to the light now because of the diffusion of the media. The predominant Indian culture has always considered women as sex objects. The inherent gender inequalities and sexist bias are manifest in the collective social psyche of Indian culture. By and large, the media have remained silent on women's issue rendering insignificance to women's voices, thus also "indicating that a free press in itself cannot guarantee representation of opinions and values of marginalized sections."⁷ Amrtya Sen has rightly observed that India "still has a long way to go in removing inequalities in the position of women".⁸ Even the advertisements seem to emphasize the traditional normative practices that denote gender inequality.

⁶ Cf. BERNARD BEL – JAN BROUWER – et al., *Media and Mediation*, Sage Publications, New Delhi 2005, 313.

⁷ SONIA BATHLA, *Women, Democracy and the Media*, Sage Publications, New Delhi 1998, 109.

⁸ AMARTYA SEN, *The Idea of Justice*, Allen Lane, London 2009, 351.

It is noteworthy that the Church in India has been working on various levels to address the gender based bias and injustice. For example, the concluding statement of the General Body Meeting of CBCI held in Pune in January 1992 makes a clear reference to the widespread and deep-rooted discrimination of women in Indian society, "Discrimination against women seems to be embedded in the structure of our society [...] Violence against women sometimes starts from the very moment of conception of the girl child and is experienced by them at all the stages of their life. Violence that is physical, sexual and psychological and practiced against women is the result of inhuman and unchristian attitude."⁹ The Gender Policy of the Catholic Church in India, prepared and promulgated by the Catholic Bishops Conference of India in 2010 can be a launching pad to achieve the goal of eradicating gender bias and injustice if the potency of media is used properly and fruitfully to create social consciousness.

Indian society is basically a patriarchal society, in which men are considered to be the standard for norms and practices. As men's possession, women are often forced into their submission. There are innumerable socio-cultural and religious organizations which try to reinforce the traditional values on them and continuously exert pressure on them by moral-policing on what to do and what to do not. The caste system along with the feudal Indian mentality has worsened the situation by virtually making the women of the lower spectrum of the society almost rape-able. The recent gory incident of raping and hanging the two girls in Uttar Pradesh bears witness to such corrupt mindset. Amidst all these seemingly hopeless situation for women, the media have been playing a redeemer role not only by publishing every unwanted incidence, but also by unearthing other socio-cultural evils, which were hidden from the public for centuries.

Conclusion

With the revolution of social networks, the media have become all-pervasive force, which can create, recreate or devalue the general

⁹ INIGO JOACHIM, *Empowering Women* in <http://inigojoachim.com/empowering-women> (10/07/2014).

conception of gender justice, equality and inclusiveness. The way they interpret or misinterpret gender may build or distort our own image as human beings. John Paul II had rightly noted that a serious study of the anthropological and theological bases is “needed in order to solve the problems connected with the meaning and dignity of being a woman and being a man.”¹⁰ One has to sit back and discern the impact and the prospects of the media in promoting or demoting gender justice. The news, entertainments and advertisements are bombarded continuously by the media like wind, thunder, earthquake and fire; but to unearth and understand the message underneath, one has to listen to their message in silencelike Prophet Elijah(cf. 1Kg 19:11-13) who searched in vain for the Lord in wind, thunder, earthquake and fire, only to be revealed in and through the tiny whispering sound.

Subordination of women is a subtle form of gender injustice being portrayed continuously by the media time and again, and its stereotyping is the violation of God-given integrity and dignity to every human being (cf. Gen 1:27). Gender justice is a matter of faith, which invites all to live and work for a just world – upholding the values of dignity and justice, inclusiveness and participation, recreating justice and dignity in relationships. Even though in continuity with the existing culture, St. Paul recommends women to cover their head in public places, he insists that all are equal in Jesus Christ, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:27-28). Gender equality signifies equal opportunities, rights and responsibilities; active participation in decision making processes. The media can play a pivotal role in bringing about an efficacious and lasting change in the way gendered justice is perceived and interpreted and thus, help remove the institutional, socio-cultural system of privilege, discrimination and oppression based on gender. It would be apt to conclude with the words of Benedict XVI, who made an urgent appeal to promote a culture of respect, dialogue and friendship, which can be instrumental in achieving gender justice and equality:

I would encourage all people of good will who are active in the emerging environment of digital communication to commit

¹⁰ JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem*, n. 1.

themselves to promoting a culture of *respect, dialogue* and *friendship*. Those who are active in the production and dissemination of new media content, therefore, should strive to *respect* the dignity and worth of the human person. If the new technologies are to serve the good of individuals and of society, all users will avoid the sharing of words and images that are degrading of human beings, that promote hatred and intolerance, that debase the goodness and intimacy of human sexuality or that exploit the weak and vulnerable¹¹.

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¹¹ BENEDICT XVI, Message for 43rd World Communication Day “*New Technologies, New Relationships. Promoting a Culture of Respect, Dialogue and Friendship.*” (24 May 2009).

Women at Vatican II: Presence and Issues

Stanislaus Alla

Active participation of the married and single women in the recently concluded Synod on Family highlighted women's role in the synodal process and for the life of the Church. It indicates a small but significant advance compared to the times when women were simply identified as wives and mothers and daughters. In the context of the ongoing Golden Jubilee celebrations of Vatican II, the paper traces the momentous steps taken to invite women as auditors and how the Church's teachings continue to work for women's progress. Though gender justice in society and gender justice in the Church are intertwined concerns, the argues that it is important to distinguish them in order to evaluate the progress made and identify the challenges in each of the areas. Author of this essay, Stanislaus Alla SJ, teaches at Vidyajyoti College of Theology, Delhi. A member of Andhra Jesuit Province, he published a few articles in both English and Telugu on Bioethical concerns and Catholic Social Teachings.

Introduction

Nirbhaya's death in December 2012 gave new life in many ways to the public discourse on the status of women in India.¹ From the traditionalists and religious fundamentalists to the liberals and communists,

¹ Along with the electronic and social media most of the Indian newspapers and periodicals gave extensive coverage in the following days and weeks to the incident that took place on 16th December, 2012 in which 'Nirbhaya' (media gave her this name) was gang-raped and brutally assaulted who later on succumbed to the injuries. *The Hindu*, *Frontline*, *Economic and Political weekly*, *The Week* and others published

from the tech-savvy youth to the illiterate rural folk, from the worried parents to the courageous girls, it made diverse people vigorously participate in the conversation. The print and electronic media redeemed themselves, for once, by consistently following the Nirbhaya story, and, thereafter many other stories of women who have been violated and discriminated in different parts of the nation, by posing questions that urgently needed public debate. In a small measure the spontaneous protests and vigils reflected the awakening of a long dormant conscience of a civilization that boasts of upholding the honor and dignity of woman but continues to promote various types of honor killings. Given the impact of the tragic episode from when more and more women began to discover and redefine themselves and to exercise their agency, it may not be inappropriate to refer to the discussions on the status of women in India as before-Nirbhaya and after-Nirbhaya.

The Nirbhaya incident also made the Catholic Church in India to revisit the issue of gender justice and the extent to which its policies promote gender justice in the Church and in society. Many would recall and gratefully acknowledge the Church's contribution, along with the Non-Governmental Organizations and the government, to ensure equality and dignity and justice to women in Indian society. While the Church's development-centered apostolates continue, efforts are on to foster ministries that are focused on human rights, justice, access and empowerment.² In this context, it is important not only to look at 'where we are' and 'where we need to go from here' with regard to the gender justice, but also to examine 'where we have come from.' The ongoing celebrations of the Golden Jubilee of the Second Vatican Council (1963-65)

editorials and in-depth analysis on the issue. The incident also received international coverage. *The Tablet* carried Ambrose Pinto's "Violence Against Women on the Subcontinent: How Indians Rose up Against Rape" (12th January, 2013) 9-10. Indian Catholic Magazines such as *New Leader* discussed the topic and *Streevani* from Pune, in collaboration with others organized the 'Third National Consultation on Gender Relations in the Church and Society' in the background of Nirbhaya issue. See also Varghese Theckanath S.G. and Julie George, SSPS, ed. *Living Nirbhaya: Pathways to Violence Free Church and Society* (Bangalore: Claretian Publications, 2014).

² For details, see Stella Baltazar, "Women & the Church: A Search for an Identity," in *The Church in India in Search of a New Identity*, ed. Kurien Kunnumpuram et al (Bangalore: NBCLC, 1997), pp. 208-237.

offer us a window to review how the women's issues and concerns were considered fifty years ago and what impact the Council's teaching had on the Church in empowering women in Indian society.

The paper mainly looks at the momentous decision to invite women to the Council, its call to end gender-based discrimination and to vigorously promote their fuller participation in building up of a just society. While acknowledging that the much-contested complementarity-centered anthropology (which assigns to women a "role in accordance with their own nature") needs a critical review, I like to argue that in places like India (and in other non-Western societies) where millions still face discrimination and whose basic human rights are violated, justice demands that the Church gives priority to 'Gender Justice in Society' over 'Gender Justice in the Church' that narrowly tends to focus on the position of women in the Church and a share in its administrative structures. In my view recognizing the distinction between these two aspects of the Church's contribution to gender justice is vital. Not infrequently, ethical discourses in the West focus on gender justice in the Church, pointing to its teachings on the *ad-intra* Church life and how slow progress has been on that front. In contrast, the paper helps us to recognize that the Church's teachings from the Second Vatican Council on gender justice in society have been much more fruitful, at least in contexts like India.

The Status of Women prior to Vatican II

Scholars point out that the status and role of woman in many societies remained very similar and unaffected until the industrial revolution destabilized them.³ By and large, women reared children, looked after the household needs and helped in the farm, which made a woman, along with her husband, a principal contributor to the household economy. Once the factory claimed the man, woman began to feel "non-involvement and non-fulfilment," even though she got ample time to focus on family and personal relations. With the advent of medical revolution "unrestricted fertility was no longer ideal," and, consequently, one can state that "Industrial revolution minimized woman's productive role, [and] medical revolution minimized her reproductive role." While in some families the

³ L.F. Cervantes and L. Harrington, "Women," *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 14, pp. 817ff. The quotes in the paragraph are from this entry.

couple go to work together, many of the features of the industrialized economies are noticeable in contemporary India.

Starting with the first wave of Feminist movement⁴ unprecedented changes marked the twentieth century and the Catholic Church was cautious in responding to the questions that concern women. M. R. O'Brien summarizes it: "A review of these [Church's] teachings on women shows an uneven but noticeable progression from initial reservations and resistance toward increasingly active promotion for the equal involvement of women with men in all dimensions of society: access to opportunities for work, protection from violence and other exploitation, political participation, and the shaping of culture."⁵

In his 1891 encyclical *Rerum Novarum* Leo XIII warned: "Women, again, are not suited for certain trades; for a woman is by nature fitted for home work, and it is that which is best adapted at once to preserve her modesty, and to promote the good bringing up of children and well-being of the family" (33). Notwithstanding the exhortation, women began to assert themselves by taking up jobs and, ironically, to discourage them from this, Pope Pius XII introduced the notion of family wage⁶ so that women would remain at home. Safety and purity remained the primary concerns of society for women and the Church teachings reflected it. Often even in today's India, these, along with family honor, continue to be the reasons why a woman is excluded from an independent social life.

Though slowly, the Church's response did evolve: after the initial refusal the Church recognized women's voting rights and political participation. At a theological level, already in the words of Pius XII, one can note the emergence of a language that continues to differentiate the roles between men and women while upholding their shared dignity. The Pope's call is clear: "So, we have an absolute equality in personal and fundamental values, but different functions which are complementary and superbly

⁴ For a discussion on three waves of feminism, see Nancy F. Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987).

⁵ M. R. O'Brien, "Women and Papal Teaching," *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 14, pp. 823-824.

⁶ *Quadragesimo anno*, 71.

equivalent, and from them arise the various rights and duties of the one and the other.”⁷ Successive popes endorsed these views and the principle of complementarity. Thus, ambiguity in the Church’s view on the status of women continued while the second wave of feminism swept parts of the western world and Pope John XXIII convoked the Second Vatican Council.

Women at Vatican II

Given that a profound desire to update, to let fresh air in, and to make the entire event an experience of new Pentecost largely permeated the Church, it is surprising that women’s role in the renewal of the Church was totally ignored at the Council until Cardinal Suenens reminded the participants that “Women, if I am not mistaken, make up one half of humanity” but who were absent at the Council.⁸ A few lay men were already there and after serious deliberations on whether to admit them or not as auditors, invitations were sent to 23 religious and lay women (first only to the unmarried or widows, and finally, to a couple) to attend the third and fourth sessions.⁹ Ironically, there were no women yet in the aula when Pope Paul VI formally welcomed them: “We are delighted to welcome among the auditors our beloved daughters in Christ, the first women in history to participate in a conciliar assembly.”¹⁰

Finally, overcoming all the obstacles women enter the conciliar assembly as auditrices with no right to speak but to participate in the deliberations of select commissions. To the many requests asking if they could speak, a negative response was given in light of the Pauline injunction ‘Let

⁷ As quoted in M. R. O’Brien, “Women and Papal Teaching,” *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 14, p.825.

⁸ See, Joseph A. Komanchak, ed., *History of Vatican II, Vol IV, Church as Communion* (Orbis: Maryknoll, 2003), p.21. Suenens quote is found here.

⁹ *Ibid.* For further details see the section on ‘The Laity, Men - and Woman,’ in this volume, pp.19ff.

¹⁰ For the quote, see Francine Cardman, ““The Church would Look Foolish Without Them”: Women and Laity since Vatican II,” in *Vatican II: Open Questions and New Horizons*, ed. Gerald M. Fagin, S.J. (Delaware, Wil.: Michael Glazier, 1984), p.120, Footnote 29.

women keep silence in the Church (1 Cor 14:34).¹¹ These women participants experienced various others kinds of exclusion as well all along. At the Masses they were denied communion and a separate coffee bar was set up for the auditrices to discourage them from mingling with the men. Madame Nhu's comments represent the despair of the many women who felt segregated and excluded: "In a woman, the Church always sees Eve instead of Mary."¹² In sum, on the one hand, the presence of women at the Council was historic -even though symbolic-and their contribution was limited to the commissions, and, on the other hand, one could still see in the reluctance to invite or let married women in traces of perceptions that consider woman as polluting or tempting or their participation was unnecessary at theological deliberations.

Women's Concerns at Vatican II

While some women representatives managed to enter into the aula, direct references to the women in the documents were few (the frequently cited examples are: AA 9, GS 9, and GS 60). However, as part of the laity, women's concerns were addressed in different places and they were also referred to in discussions on the nature and significance of family, marriage and sexuality. Renewed self-understanding of the Church as People of God, universal call to holiness and the baptism-based invitation to the laity to participate in the life of the Church and its mission on their own right strongly redefine the role of women. Leaving out these references (with their ecclesiological and missionary implications), I shall briefly comment on the texts that specifically speak of gender justice in society, that call the entire Church to promote women's dignity and their fuller participation.

Discussing the Church's mission in the modern world, a few bishops spoke on women's concerns.¹³ Representing forty bishops, Codera wanted the Church to affirm that "woman has her own personality, given

¹¹ Komanchak, *History of Vatican II* Vol IV, p.21. The Message to Women at the end of the Council also idealizes them but fails to see them in themselves apart from being daughters, mothers and wives.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ For further details and the quotes of bishops, see Komanchak, *History of Vatican II* Vol IV, p. 306.

to her by God, and a very specific role in human society and in the Church.” Describing the situation in Africa, Mulala suggested that the Church work toward “the promotion of woman to her full human dignity and responsibility.” Frotz from Cologne wanted the Church to enable women “enjoy all positions and ministries in civil society and in the Church.” Concerns to improve the lot of women find mention primarily in *Gaudium et Spes*.

Human dignity is a crucial theological principle the first chapter of *Gaudium et Spes* endorses. The creation account from the Bible serves as the foundation to affirm every person’s dignity. Being made in the image and likeness of God offers inviolable dignity to all, men and women without distinction. Affirmation of women’s dignity enables us to recognize their capacity to know, to decide, and to activate their moral agency and shape their lives and destinies. Here we note the Church’s resolve to make the affirmation and promotion of the inalienable and intrinsic dignity of all people, especially women, as her mission.

Developing its understanding of dignity further, the Church affirms the essential equality of all people (*GS* #29).¹⁴ It is emphatic on its stand against all kinds of discrimination: “Undoubtedly not all men are alike as regards physical capacity and intellectual and moral powers. But forms of social or cultural discrimination in basic personal rights on the grounds of sex, race, colour, social conditions, language or religion, must be curbed and eradicated as incompatible with God’s design” (*GS* #29). It also insists that women “be permitted to play their part fully according to their own particular nature” (#60). With regard to establishing gender justice in society, these texts serve as a charter to renew and to design creatively the Church’s apostolates and effectively implement programs to affirm women’s dignity and fight against discrimination. However, ambiguity remained regarding the status and role of women in the Church and in its ministries and it has been the subject of much study.

Developments since Vatican II

At the universal level the role of woman in society continues to draw the Church’s attention even as it insists that a family’s claim to woman

¹⁴ The quotations from the Vatican II are taken from Austin Flannery, O.P., ed., *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents* (Bombay: St Pauls, 2004).

has primacy. Affirming woman's dignity Pope Paul VI states that women should not seek "false equality which would deny the distinctions laid down by the Creator himself and which would be in contradiction with women's proper role, which is of such capital importance, at the heart of the family as well as within society" (*Octogesimaadveniens*, 13).¹⁵ In *Mulieris dignitatem* (1988)¹⁶ Pope John Paul II meditates on the role and status of women, especially in light of the example of Mary, and reaffirms the centrality of the principle of complementarity to understand the distinctive roles of man and woman. Briefly, complementarity is "the anthropological and theological conviction that women and men, while equal in dignity before God, have qualities and functions rooted in their nature that complement one another."¹⁷ Vigorous debates continue on the significance and implication of this notion and the extent to which it blocks the fuller participation of women in social and ecclesial life.¹⁸

After the Council one can see a new momentum in the Indian Church's efforts to fight gender discrimination. Rapid growth of the religious congregations and their commitment to work for the empowerment of the people contributed to it. *Caritas* started a section for women development in 1985 and in 1992 CBCI, for the first time, named 'women' along with the Dalits and tribals as a group that need urgent attention and set up a Desk to coordinate the efforts.¹⁹ In its 2004 meet the Indian Theological Association reflected on the theme "Concerns of Women: An Indian Theological Response." In 2008 the CBCI discussed and eventually published Indian Church's official Gender Policy, a bold move in itself. All these efforts reflect Indian Church's attempts to bring gender justice in society.

¹⁵ See http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/paul_vi/apost_letters/documents/hf_p-vi_apl_19710514_octogesima-adveniens_en.html

¹⁶ See http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_letters/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_15081988_mulieris-dignitatem_en.html

¹⁷ O'Brien, *Women and Papal Teaching*, p.824.

¹⁸ For a discussion on it, see Harriet A. Luckman, "Vatican II and the Role of Woman" in *Vatican II Forty Years Later*, ed. William Madges (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2006), pp.78-99. Here I did not refer to the debate on the ordination of women but one may read the 1976 Vatican document *Inter insigniores* and the 1994 *Ordinatio sacerdotalis* which teach that it is reserved to men alone.

¹⁹ See, Baltazar, *Women and the Church*, p.227.

Concluding remarks

While recognizing that Vatican II singularly contributed to affirm women's dignity and to fight gender discrimination we also realize that the understanding of Church on the role and status of women makes gender justice in the Church a highly contested topic. Here I have attempted to make a distinction between the Western societies where due to various forces gender justice in society has been by and large achieved (or at least people have instruments and structures to fight against violence and discrimination) and those societies including India where it eludes millions. While undoubtedly gender justice in the Church needs to be pursued universally, I suggest that on a priority basis, gender justice in society must be pursued by the Church in a context like India. If one were to ask the opinion of the violated and discriminated millions of women, or even the Catholic poor, to tell which of the two the Church should pursue, I suspect, they would respond that the efforts to empower larger sections of people are crucial. At the same time, in light of Vatican II's insights, we need to recover the spirit of the early Church in which men and women played diverse roles to spread the good news and to celebrate God's transforming and empowering presence.

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Revisiting *Mulieris Dignitatem*

Key Insights for Enhancing the Dignity of Women in Society

Matthew Coutinho

Living as we do in times that have seen a burgeoning of crimes against women, the principal cause seems to be a lack of respect for women. In the Catholic Church this state of affairs has been changing and today we have magisterial interventions that call us to accord women equal dignity and rights for they are created in the image and likeness of God just as men are. This paper is an attempt to examine *Mulieris Dignitatem* (MD) – the landmark letter of Pope St. John Paul II on the Dignity and Vocation of Women in order to draw out focal points that need to enter the discourse on gender justice. After situating MD, the paper examines the principal sections of the document. Finally, it briefly looks at what we can use from MD to make the dignity of women part of mainstream ethos within the Church and society at large. Author of this essay, Matthew Coutinho, is a Salesian priest. At present he is lecturer in Philosophy, Religion and Psychology at Divyadaan, Nashik; and, also visiting professor of Moral Theology and Bioethics at St. Pius College (Goregaon) and Sacred Heart Theological College (Shillong).

This paper is an attempt to examine *Mulieris Dignitatem*¹ – the landmark letter of Pope Saint John Paul II on the Dignity and Vocation of Women in order to draw out focal points that need to enter the discourse on gender justice. Living as we do in times that have seen a

¹ JOHN PAUL II, *Mulieris Dignitatem: Apostolic Letter on the Dignity and Vocation of Women*, Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1988. [Available at http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_letters/documents/hf_jpii_apl_1508_1988_mulieris-dignitatem_en.html accessed on 24 June 2014] [Hereafter MD]

burgeoning of crimes against women, the principal cause seems to be a lack of respect for women. This latter state of affairs is - unjustifiably in my opinion - traced to religious and cultural traditions. While the theological underpinnings point to the equal dignity of men and women going back to the Book of Genesis, the fact of the matter is that Christianity in particular – following the ethos of civil society – has in the past given scant attention to the portrayal of women sometimes reducing them to subservience and servitude. In the Catholic Church this state of affairs has been changing and today we have magisterial interventions that call us to accord women equal dignity and rights for they are created in the image and likeness of God just as men are. While the challenge remains of moving from theory to practice, this paper will attempt to look at the theological justification of a gender just society, using the wonderful insights available in MD.

I will begin by situating MD in its historical context recalling significant events in history that preceded its writing. The principal section of this paper will be devoted to highlighting key insights following the sections in MD. Finally, I will briefly look at what we can use from this document to make the dignity of women part of mainstream ethos within the Church and society at large.

Situating *Mulieris Dignitatem*

It may be useful to situate *Mulieris Dignitatem* by looking at the cultural environment within which it arose.

The Magisterium had already looked at issues concerning women even before the Second Vatican Council. There were a number of discourses by Pius XII, and this discussion continued in the Encyclical *Pacem in Terris* of John XXIII.²

The Second Vatican Council gave importance to the role of women, while it noted problems in society. “As for the family, discord results from population, economic and social pressures, or from difficulties which arise between succeeding generations, or from new social relationships

² For one collection of Magisterial interventions on women issues see Angelo SCOLA, “The Dignity and Mission of Women: The Anthropological and Theological Foundations” in *Communio* 25/1 (Spring 1998): 43 footnote 2.

between men and women.”³ Also, now we see that women work in all spheres. “It is fitting that they are able to assume their proper role in accordance with their own nature. It will belong to all to acknowledge and favor the proper and necessary participation of women in the cultural life.” (GS 60) In the closing statement of the Council we read:

The hour is coming, in fact it has already come, when the vocation of women is being acknowledged in its fullness, the hour in which women acquire in the world an influence, an effect and a power never hitherto achieved. That is why, at this moment when the human race is undergoing so deep a transformation, women imbued with a spirit of the Gospel can do so much to aid humanity in not falling.⁴

We need to note that during the time between the Second Vatican Council and the publication of MD, “women’s issues” exploded to the forefront in Western nations as the feminist movement grew in strength. Women entered the job market, universities, professions, and politics in unprecedented numbers. Birth control information and devices became readily available; and powerful women’s organizations arose.⁵

This movement towards advancement and liberation had its victories and setbacks, and women were divided in their opinions regarding these changes. As the pastors of the Church read these and other signs of the times, it was clear that the time was right to offer teaching and guidance informed by the light of the Gospel, not only to the faithful but to all people of good will.

Introductory Remarks

Let us now take a closer look at *Mulieris Dignitatem* which has made a significant contribution to the thinking of the Church on women⁶.

³ SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *Gaudium et spes: Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, no. 8.

⁴ PAUL VI, *Second Vatican Council Closing Speech*, 8 December 1965. [Available at <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Paul06/p6closin.htm> accessed on 24 June 2014]

⁵ Marguerite PEETERS, “A Spousal Hour” in *Ave Maria Law Review* 8/1 (Fall 2009):1-2.

⁶ I have followed the principal divisions found in: Prudence ALLEN, “*Mulieris Dignitatem* Twenty Years Later: An overview of the document and challenges” in *Ave Maria Law Review* 8/1 (Fall 2009):13-47.

Pope John Paul II (JPII) described it as a “meditation” on the feminine vocation. MD was a direct result of issues which were discussed in the Synod of Bishops (October 1987), on “The Vocation and Mission of the Laity in the Church”. The synod fathers recommended the “study of the anthropological and theological bases” relating to issues concerning the meaning and dignity of being a woman and being a man.” (MD 1)

In MD, JPII avers that to understand the depth of the dignity and the mission of women one must begin from proper anthropological and theological foundations. He critically and creatively engages with the concerns of the Church and of society presenting a new “Christian feminism”.

The two theological strands that form the basis of the dignity of a woman and a man are: our great dignity rooted theologically in our creation in the image and likeness of God; and, our Redemption through Jesus the Son of God.

Marian Roots

In chapter two of MD we are led to a new depth of understanding of Mary’s place in the Church and world, definitively revealed through what is called the “Annunciation dialogue.” (MD 5)

At the centre of the Annunciation event is a woman who responds to God’s call. Her ‘yes’ enables her to attain a union with God that is beyond all human expectations and imagining (MD 3). She becomes *Theotokos* (Mother of God) in the fullness of time thus manifesting the extraordinary dignity of women. We know that JPII, just one year before MD, described Mary as the Pilgrim Guide at the center of the Pilgrim Church.⁷ Because Mary shared in the dignity and call of our human nature and lived the pilgrimage of her vocation before us, she is an apt guide for us on our pilgrimage individually and communally, just as she guided her friends in the early Church after the death and Resurrection of her Son. (RM 25-28.)

Using the icon Mary ‘Woman - Mother of God’ is an appropriate way to initiate the reflection on the dignity and the vocation of women. “The

⁷ JOHN PAUL II, *Redemptoris Mater: Encyclical Letter on the Blessed Virgin Mary in the Life of the Pilgrim Church*, Vatican City: LEV, 1987. (Henceforth RM)

dignity of every human being and the vocation corresponding to that dignity find their definitive measure in union with God." Mary, the mother of God, "is the most complete expression of this dignity and vocation" for she was able to correspond to God's invitation. (MD 5)

Mary having shared in the dignity and call of our human nature and lived the pilgrimage of her vocation before us, is able to guide us on our pilgrimage individually and communally, just as she guided the early Church after the death and Resurrection of Jesus.

The Man-Woman Relation

At this point in MD, JP II draws attention to some key truths about woman in relation to man and in relation to God. (MD 6-8) First, he describes the man-woman relation. Second, he elaborates the essential characteristics of the analogy between the divine relations among the Persons of the Holy Trinity on one hand, and the human personal relations between women and men on the other.

He says very clearly commenting on Gen 1:27, where we read about the creation of human beings by God, that the "existence of man and woman, crowns the whole work of creation; *both man and woman are human beings to an equal degree*, both are created *in God's image*." (6)

Looking at the second creation story in Genesis 2:18-25, which makes use of a language which is descriptive and metaphorical, to express the truth about the creation of man, and especially of woman, he notes that there is no "essential contradiction". "In fact, it *helps us to understand evenmore profoundly* the fundamental truth which it contains *concerning man* created as man and woman in the image and likeness of God." (6) And that fundamental truth is: *The woman is another 'I' in a common humanity*. Essentially, "*Man is a person, man and woman equally so*, since both were created in the image and likeness of the personal God." This can be called "integral gender complementarity"⁸

⁸ Prudence ALLEN, "Man-Woman Complementarity: The Catholic Inspiration" in *Logos* 9/3 (Summer 2006): 87-108. This article provides a historical overview of different conceptions of gender equality and difference ending with call to integral complementarity as the best means towards gender justice.

Having established their inherent equality in dignity, there is need to also note their complementarity. This begins in MD 7. Man cannot exist alone (cf. Gen 2:18), He exists “only as a ‘unity of the two’, and therefore *in relation to another human person*. It is a question here of a mutual relationship: man to woman and woman to man.” Thus, we are created in the image and likeness of God “existing in a relationship, in relation to the other ‘I’ .

He goes on to say that “The whole of human history unfolds within the context of this call. In this history, on the basis of the principle of mutually being ‘for’ the other, in interpersonal ‘communion’, there develops in humanity itself, in accordance with God’s will, the integration of *what is ‘masculine’ and what is ‘feminine’*.” (MD 7) While the Pope does not specify the essential characteristics that distinguish the masculine from the feminine, he introduces this distinction as significant even while he states that interpersonal communion is vital to bring together what is masculine and what is feminine. There is thus a play between equal dignity – difference – complementarity.

The Communio of the Trinity - The Communio of Men and Women

JPII appears to be making a distinction between the *image of God*, which is found in each individual man and woman, created with an intellect and will; and the *likeness of God*, which is more clearly seen in a communion of human persons called to become a living sign of the *communio* among the Divine Persons. In the the mystery of the Trinity there is a “living unity in the communion of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit”. The word ‘communion’ was developed during the Second Vatican Council, especially in the documents *Lumen Gentium* and *Gaudium et Spes*.⁹ This communion is explained as community and social unity based on “sincere self-giving”.

Anthropomorphism in Language

Another significant element that is introduced in MD is clarification of the anthropomorphisms in Biblical language. It is evident that using

⁹ SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *Lumen Gentium: Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, nos. 9, 13, 32-33, 49-51 and, GS 50.

scripture to buttress theological ideas is rife with pitfalls if one is not careful to use sound exegetical principles. The Bible uses human language, concepts and images and we need to be careful to delineate the limits of the analogy and the 'likeness'. There is both 'likeness' and 'non-likeness' between Creator and creation. The 'masculine' and 'feminine' categories describe but never exhaust the Supreme Being. The generation we attribute to God is analogical to that we attribute to human beings (fatherhood and motherhood), for the former is "completely spiritual and divine in essence". (MD, 8)

Sin and Rupture

In chapter four of MD, JP II says that specific differences between women and men came as a consequence of original sin. Thus while from the beginning the Creator gives a special gift to the human being (man and woman): dignity and the call to share in the intimate life of God; by committing sin, man rejects this gift and by the misuse of freedom forfeits the original state of one-ness with God. Referring to the story of the Fall, MD notes that the need to toil, to suffer the pain of childbirth, and to return to dust (Gen 3: 16-19) are consequences of this challenge to God's sovereignty.

While in general all human beings are affected by the disorder of the passions, the dulling of intellect, and weakening of will, he suggests that the text of Genesis offers a clue to some gender-differentiated inheritances of original sin. More specifically Genesis 3:16 will show how that 'domination' is a disturbance that flows from the *loss of the stability* of that *fundamental equality* which the man and the woman possess. Consequently the woman suffers, for it is only from the equality resulting from their dignity as persons that the mutual relationship of man and woman can take on the character of an authentic '*communio personarum*'. (MD 10)

MD demonstrates another danger. In opposing the domination of men, society needs to guard against the 'masculinization' of women. "In the name of liberation from male 'domination', women must not appropriate to themselves male characteristics contrary to their own feminine 'originality'". Taking this path will lead to women losing what constitutes their essential richness. (MD 10)

Yet, this in no way means that we can leave the domination of women by men unchallenged. All human beings, whether woman or man, must realize that “whenever man is responsible for offending a woman’s personal dignity and vocation, he acts contrary to his own personal dignity and his own vocation.” (MD 10)

Christ: The Means to Overcome the Rupture

In MD 11, we have the main principle of the letter: “In Christ the mutual opposition between man and woman - which is the inheritance of original sin - is essentially overcome.” The promise made in the proto-evangelium that the seed of the Woman would crush the Evil One is fulfilled in Christ.

MD continues then to offer example after example of how Jesus Christ, when he walked upon the earth, revealed to each woman he met who she was and who she was called to be. (MD 12-14) “In all of Jesus’ teaching, as well as in his behaviour, one can find nothing which reflects the discrimination against women prevalent in his day. On the contrary, *his words and works always express the respect and honour due to women.*” (MD 13) Given the prevailing cultural climate in which Jesus lived, this was truly innovative. He did this by first entering “into the concrete and historical situation of women, a situation which is weighed down by the inheritance of sin” - such as in his encounter with the woman accused of adultery and the men who were about to stone her. (MD 13-14) In other documents, JPII further elaborates on ways women are harmed by individual sin and social sin structures.¹⁰

Another notable inference from the Gospel narratives concerning Jesus and his interaction with women is that the “women who are close to Christ discover themselves in the truth which he ‘teaches’ and ‘does’, even when this truth concerns their ‘sinfulness’. They feel ‘*liberated*’ by this truth, restored to themselves: they feel loved with ‘eternal love’.” (MD 15) Christ speaks to different women about the things of God (eg.

¹⁰ JOHN PAUL II, *Evangelium Vitae*, no. 99 (rejecting “all discrimination, violence and exploitation” of or against women); JOHN PAUL II, *Letter to Women*, nos. 4 - 5 (1995), (expressing concern that women are not yet “fully integrated into social, political, and economic life,” especially those who have “chosen to be wives and mothers,” and condemning the sexual exploitation of women)

the Samaritan woman [Jn 4: 1-42] and Martha [Jn 11:21-27]), and there is a resonance of mind and heart, enabling them to respond in faith.

After these encounters, wherein Jesus Christ, reveals to a person who she really is, several women in the Gospel, are sent forward in their vocation to serve in a specified way. To Mary Magdalene, who was “the first to meet the Risen Christ,” Jesus gives the task of communicating the message of the Resurrection to the other apostles thus making her ‘the apostle of the Apostles.’ (MD 16) Similarly, the Samaritan woman announces to her friends and neighbours that he is the Messiah. (MD, 15) With this orientation to vocation in general, MD moves on to examine the internal structure of womens’ specific vocations in the Church.

Two Paths in the Vocation of Women: Motherhood - Virginity

In chapter six of MD, JP II develops the two paradigm vocations for women in the Church viz. marriage or consecrated virginity, both involving marriage and motherhood in complementary ways (MD 17-21). Using the example of Mary, mother of Jesus, he indicates how virginity and motherhood co-exist in her. (MD 17) Sacramental marriage and biological motherhood “bring about - on the woman’s part - a special ‘gift of self,’ as an expression of that spousal love whereby the two are united to each other so closely that they become ‘one flesh.’” (MD 18) In like manner, consecrated women “give themselves to the divine Spouse, and this personal gift tends to union, which is properly spiritual in character. (MD 20) The key idea is the concept of ‘spousal love’ – the love by which one gifts oneself to the other. (MD 30)

JP II distinguishes between two complementary bonds of marriage, using both material and spiritual criteria. He insists that a woman’s motherhood in sacramental marriage is spiritual as well as physical. Even though a woman’s psychophysical structure is naturally oriented toward motherhood, a purely bio-physiological interpretation of woman and of motherhood would be to limit our understanding of her identity. (MD 18)

The Pope points out that the spiritual marriage of the consecrated woman often manifests itself in various material situations. In his words, “[M]otherhood ‘according to the Spirit’ ...can express itself as concern

for people...the sick, the handicapped, the abandoned, orphans, the elderly, children, young people, the imprisoned and, in general, people on the margins of society.” (MD 21)

Further, JP II observes that “*women* are more capable than men of paying attention *to another person*, and that motherhood develops this predisposition even more.” In many ways the father who remains “‘outside’ the process of pregnancy and the baby’s birth...has to *learn* his own ‘fatherhood’ from the mother.” (MD 18) This passage lays the foundation for what will become the new impetus for JP II’s genius of women, namely her way of paying attention to the whole person in her sphere of activity, in all circumstances.

Spousal Bonds Lead to Complementarity

In chapter seven of *Mulieris Dignitatem*, JP II opens up a radically new dimension of sacramental marriage with great implications for the nature and dignity of women. For many generations before this, a woman’s subordination to her husband was often attributed as her punishment for Eve’s sin, whereby God placed her under the authority of a man, due to her abuse of freedom. Instead, we read in MD that, a man and a woman are called to “mutual self-giving [that] is not distorted either by the desire of the man to become the ‘master’ of his wife (‘he shall rule over you’) or by the woman remaining closed within her own instincts (‘your desire shall be for your husband,’ Gen 3:16).” (MD 18)

Further MD introduces “The Gospel ‘Innovation,’” based on Ephesians 5:21, that in marriage there is to be “a new way: as a ‘mutual subjection out of reverence for Christ.’” (MD 24) There is a differentiation between the relation of husband and wife and the analogous relation of Christ and the Church discussed in Ephesians: “[W]hereas in the relationship between Christ and the Church the subjection is only on the part of the Church, in the relationship between husband and wife the ‘subjection’ is not one-sided but mutual.” (MD 24). This is the newness of the Gospel. “In this love there is a fundamental affirmation of the woman as a person. This affirmation makes it possible for the female personality to develop fully and be enriched...All the reasons in favor of the ‘subjection’ of woman to man in marriage must be understood in the sense of a ‘mutual subjection’ of both ‘out of reverence for Christ.’” (MD 24)

In summary we can say that the spousal dimension of vocations to sacramental marriage, consecrated virginity, and priesthood has been revealed through faith as living signs of the spousal dimension of reality. These complementary vocations serve as living signs to one another of different aspects of this reality.

The Feminine Genius and Service to Others

Another point to consider with respect to the nature and dignity of woman is JP II's innovative discussion in chapter eight, in which he introduces the 'genius' which belongs to women, and which can ensure sensitivity for human beings in every circumstance: because they are human! (MD 30) He refers to these qualities as signs of "the feminine genius," and he uses the word "feminine" uniquely to describe a woman's way of acting in the world. (MD 31) The meaning of this 'genius' is explained elaborately in his 1995 *Letter to Women*, where he writes:

Necessary emphasis should be placed on the "genius of women," not only by considering great and famous women of the past or present, but also those ordinary women who reveal the gift of their womanhood by placing themselves at the service of others in their everyday lives. For in giving themselves to others each day women fulfill their deepest vocation. Perhaps more than men, women acknowledge the person, because they see persons with their hearts. They see them independently of various ideological or political systems. They see others in their greatness and limitations; they try to go out to them and help them. (LTW 12)

In MD, the Pope identifies what seems to be an essential characteristic of the genius of a woman. "A woman is strong because of her awareness of this entrustment, strong because of the fact that God 'entrusts the human being to her,' always and in every way, even in the situations of social discrimination in which she may find herself." (MD 30) In *Evangelium Vitae*, too, JP II pleads with women to develop their genius for the good of society. (EV 99) It is essential for the world that women do what is necessary in the area of their vocation especially promoting a culture of life.

The Conclusion of MD (MD 31) starts with a reflection on the quotation “If you knew the gift of God” (*Jn* 4:10), which Jesus says to the Samaritan woman during one of those remarkable interactions which shows his great esteem for the dignity of women and for their vocation to be part of the messianic mission. MD has made an effort to examine how women like men who receive this “gift of God” can discover the entire meaning of their femininity and thus be disposed to making a sincere gift of themselves to others.

The Church is grateful “*for all the manifestations of the feminine ‘genius’*”, and “*for all the fruits of feminine holiness.*” It is her hope that recognizing and appreciating these manifestations of the Holy Spirit, all humanity may continue to be enriched by the contribution of women. JPII prays that “*Mary, who ‘is a model of the Church in the matter of faith, charity, and perfect union with Christ’, obtain for all of us this same ‘grace’.*” (MD 31)

Key Take-Aways from MD

Pope Benedict XVI addressing a congress commemorating the twentieth anniversary of *Mulieris Dignitatem* held in Rome had this to say:

A renewed anthropological study is certainly necessary based on the great Christian tradition, which incorporates new scientific advances and, given today’s cultural sensitivity, in this way contributes to deepening not only the feminine identity but also the masculine, which is often the object of partial and ideological reflections...There are places and cultures where women are discriminated against or undervalued for the sole fact of being women...where acts of violence are consummated in regard to women, making them the object of mistreatment and of exploitation in advertising and in the consumer and entertainment industry. Faced with such grave and persistent phenomena the Christian commitment appears all the more urgent so that everywhere it may promote a culture that recognizes the dignity that belongs to women, in law and in concrete reality.¹¹

¹¹ Benedict XVI, “Address to the participants in the International Convention on the theme ‘Woman and Man, the *humanum* in its entirety,’ in *L’Osservatore Romano (English)* (20 February 2008): 3.

We see that in many ways JPII's *Mulieris Dignitatem*, was a watershed document for understanding the source and consequences of a woman's dignity. While many of its chapters **reassert** the traditional teachings: the truth about woman, as one of two ways of being a human being, is discovered through both reason and faith; sin has caused a serious rupture in relations between women and men; encountering Jesus Christ frees a woman from the inheritance of original sin and calls for the entrusting of woman and man to each other; and there are two paradigm vocations for women in the Church, sacramental marriage and spiritual marriage of the consecrated life.

There are also some **innovative principles** about women's dignity and vocation, drawn from JPII's formation within Christian personalism, among which are that a new feminism is needed which rejects all forms of domination; that woman's genius is rooted in her concern for the human being in every situation because of an awareness that God entrusts the human being to her in a special way; that women must lead men to this same recognition of the dignity of every human being; and that this contribution of women is needed for authentic cultural change.

We also need to point out areas that call for **greater study and clarification**. I would like to highlight two: the problems involved in the use of the word 'complementarity'; and, the limiting of possible vocations for women to the two paradigm vocations. While the use of the word 'complementarity' is laudable, it has sometimes been taken to mean that the roles assigned to men and women in society are watertight compartments with no room for interchange. This usage can sometimes be used to canonize certain cultural stereotypes which have no basis in fact. In the present day context the words 'reciprocal' and 'collaborative' have greater resonance.

Another area where MD has been found wanting is the allocation of the two paradigm vocations. The question posed is: Are these the only two ways open to adult women. What about those who do not enter consecrated life or marriage? Women in this category do not feel suitably addressed by the above-mentioned reflection on the two paradigms, and, MD seems to leave out this segment of women from consideration. It

almost seems to say that if you are not a consecrated virgin or a mother then there is something lacking in your femininity.

These two remarks notwithstanding MD has been truly a path-breaking contribution when one considers issues concerning women in the Church and society. The Church has much to contribute in the search for a paradigm that can enhance the position of women in the family and society. The process needs to begin with the family – the building block of society. An ethic of equality, of dignity and respect, of recognition of complementarity, of empowerment will go a long way towards making the oppression and denigration of women history.

Prudence Allen has remarked very poignantly: “Finally, the world eagerly awaits another apostolic letter from a subsequent pope on the ‘Dignity and Vocation of Men’ (the male human being). If such a letter were to have the depth and originality of JP II’s *Dignity and Vocation of Women*, then it will become a great impetus for further new evangelization and authentic cultural change.”¹²

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¹² Prudence ALLEN, “*Mulieris Dignitatem* Twenty Years Later”, 47.

Complex and Uncertain Etiology of Homosexuality

Thomas Srampickal

Homosexuality, as an orientation and/or behavior, calls for scientific explanation in terms of its psychosomatic origin and human implications. It also attracts social, moral, legal judgments of various sorts. Given the complex nature of homosexuality, its etiology - study of its causation - matters much. Thomas Srampickal, well known moral theologian, makes a groundbreaking study of the etiology of homosexuality. This work will surely guide the process of making informed and responsible moral judgments of homosexuality.

Homosexuality is a complex subject involving several dimensions – biological, psychological, social, moral, legal, etc., –also controversial in its definition, features, etiology and cure, and loaded with political and partisan overtones. However, this article confines itself to its etiology, which is also complex owing to the multiplicity of proposed causes, lack of clear evidence and probable interaction of different causes. We do not intend a thorough discussion of all possible etiological elements. Our objective is rather modest, namely, to present within the confines of an article the major contemporary theories, shorn of confusing details, on the etiology of homosexuality for average readers.

I.What is Homosexuality?

Homosexuality has been generally understood as sexual activity/behaviour between members of the same sex. Alfred Kinsey in his

research on sexuality begun in 1940s also considered same-sex behavior/contact as the key mark of homosexuality. Gradually, the opinion has changed because sexual behavior between same-sex members may occur owing to non-availability of opposite-sex members, excessive pressure, etc. Such instances are normally transient, casual or not really desired, and hence cannot be called homosexuality in the proper sense. Homosexuality proper refers to a person's *sexual orientation*. Sexual orientation is 'a trait that disposes a person to experience sexual attraction to others'¹. This attraction involves the feeling of being drawn to another erotically. The attraction may be to the members of the opposite sex (heterosexuality), same sex (homosexuality) or both sexes (bisexuality). R. Westheimer states: "Homosexual is one whose primary psychological and physical erotic attraction is to members of one's own sex".²

As a trait, homosexual attraction is considered to be stable. However, the reality is not so simple and tidy. Variations are not negligible. Some are strong and others weak in their homosexual characteristics. There are fluctuations, changes and reversals. Married persons with children have later become homosexuals as homosexuals have later turned heterosexuals.³ However, a homosexual having occasional heterosexual fantasies, feelings, urges, etc., is considered natural just as a heterosexual having occasional homosexual fantasies, feelings, urges, etc. Homosexual orientation does not force the person to act it out, i.e. the person can normally control his/her behaviour, just as a heterosexual can control his/her behavior. Further, the person's self-perception as a homosexual,

¹ Simon Le Vay, *Gay, Straight and the Reason Why: The Science of Sexual Orientation*, Oxford Uni. Press, New York, 2011, 1 (Henceforth, *Gay, Straight and the Reason*); Irwin Sarason and Barbara. Sarason, *Abnormal Psychology, The Problem of Maladaptive Behaviour*, Prentice-Hall Inc., New Delhi, 2005, 275-276.

² Ruth Westheimer and Sanford Lopater, *Human Sexuality: A Psychosocial, Perspective* Lippincott Williams and Wilkins, Baltimore, 2005 (2nd Ed.), 325. **Note:** In this article, homosexual/homosexuality refers to both men and women of the same-sex orientation; similarly, heterosexual/heterosexuality refers to both men and women of the opposite-sex orientation. 'Gay' refers exclusively to homosexual men, 'lesbian' exclusively to homosexual women and 'straight' to both.

³ Cfr. Le Vay, *Gay, Straight and the Reason*, 159, 166, 181, 287 ff.

acknowledging it before others and happiness in being so are among important psycho-social marks of a homosexual today.⁴

II. Etiological Approaches to Homosexuality

Main theories about the causes of homosexuality are dominantly i) *psychological* – psychoanalysis and behaviourism- ii) *biological* – involving hormones, genes and brain – and iii) *bio-psycho-social*–‘exotic becomes erotic’(EBE) theory.

II.1. Psychoanalytic Approach

Freud speaks about homosexuality (‘inversion’, as it was known then) in his *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905)⁵. According to Freud humans beings are open to bisexuality, having heterosexual and homosexual inclinations. However, during normal psycho-sexual development, heterosexual desires and preferences become dominant, though homosexual urges do not die out.

Freudian psychodynamic approach was one of the first systematic attempts to explain the origin of homosexuality and dominated the field for several decades. Freud sees homosexuality as a phenomenon which can occur during the course of personality development which is a libido-centered process. He held that the sexual/erotic instinct or *libido* was present and active in the child from birth. It is transformed during the course of development through various stages, focusing on and deriving pleasure from different zones in the body. Freud’s stages are well known: oral, when the libido of an (new born) infant is focused on its mouth, deriving satisfaction and pleasure by sucking mother’s breasts; anal, when the focus shifts to the anus, deriving pleasure from defecation; phallic, when the interest shifts to the phallus – penis or clitoris – obtaining pleasure by masturbation. About the same time, the libido becomes directed also to other people; that is, away from one’s own body. Boy’s libido is now directed to other boys because he perceives them as similar to him, especially in having penis. This is a homosexual phase in the

⁴ Gerard Coleman, *Human Sexuality: An all-embracing gift*, Alba House, New York, 1997/1992, 239 ff.

⁵ Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, Avon Books, New York, 1905, 22ff.

development of the boy, but adults do not remember this phase because they have all (whether straight or gay) repressed it. (Freud is silent about this phase in the case of girls).

This is followed by the oedipal phase – about three years of age – when a boy's libido is transferred to his mother. Subsequently, the boy begins to experience the oedipal conflict because on the one hand he has the strong urge to possess the mother and on the other he sees his father as an unconquerable rival and threat. The boy is afraid that if his father knew about his desire to possess the mother he (father) would punish him by castration. The boy solves the problem and regains his composure by (subconsciously) identifying with the father, that is, acting like and becoming like the father and getting emotionally close to him. Then development enters the rather calm and trouble-free latency stage, which is followed at puberty by the genital stage where libido is usually satisfied by heterosexual relationships.

In this scheme adult male homosexuality results when the libido, having entered the oedipal phase, fails to break out of it, and remains fixated on the mother. Hence, the classical Freudian formula: homosexuals have not passed the oedipal stage. A question here is: wouldn't it be more likely for a boy fixated on the mother to become attracted to a woman and become heterosexual, given the fact that his mother is a woman? Though Freud's answer to this problem shows some variation, the main point is the following: if the mother is too close to the boy who is attracted to her, the child too becomes very close to (over-identified with) the mother and then it becomes difficult for him to break out of it. From his clinical experience with homosexuals Freud observed, 'in such cases the mother was too close or even seductive, and thus prevented the boy from breaking away'. From his studies, Bieber says: "Where there were other children, the homosexual son was clearly the mother's favourite. More often than not, she openly preferred him to her husband".⁶ Because of over-identification with the mother, the boy wants to take her (woman's) place in sexual relationship and this makes him seek a male partner. This may be put in another way: over-identification with the mother

⁶ Irving Bieber, Male Homosexuality, in *Canadian Journal of Psychiatry*, vol. 24(1979) 409

generates in the boy a female / feminine self-concept ('gender-identity deficit') and he seeks partnership with a male, and wants to show his desire to be a woman. It is a partnership between a biological male who is psychologically female and another biological male. Such a male is said to take a rather passive (woman's) role in sexual union, for example, offering his anus for intercourse in homosexual union.

Similarly, if a girl over-identifies with the father during the oedipal stage, she may develop a male / masculine self-concept and seek a female partner. Such a one is likely to take a man's role in lesbian union, for example, trying to penetrate the female partner's vagina with some penis-like object. However, Freud was more clear and emphatic in the case of boys than that of girls.

A domineering mother who is strict and harsh to the son has been also considered a likely cause of male homosexuality. The boy who expects the mother (and a woman) to be normally loving and caring, feels alienated and frustrated with the attitude afraid of the mother. He develops fear, rejection and hatred of the mother, which is generalized to all women (fear of females') These negative attitudes towards women drive him to homosexuality.

Without denying the role of faulty close-binding mother-son relationship, psychodynamic theory today attributes significant role also to faulty, strongly negative father-son relationship in leading the youngster to homosexuality. Look at two summary cases⁷ from psychiatric findings. i) A male homosexual interviewed at 21 years of age. When he was 13 years old he acquired a close friend. Otherwise he was isolated from close peer relationships. His father objected to the friendship and tried to break it up. He called the son's friend "son-of-a-bitch" and the son retaliated by calling the father "son-of-a-bitch". Enraged, the father wrestled the boy to the ground and began to choke him. Hearing the struggle, the mother, who was in the adjacent room, rushed in and separated them. The boy ran out of the house and after several hours of anxious search the mother found him wandering in the neighbourhood.

⁷ We have serially numbered the cases/ studies referred in this article and refer to them when needed as 'cases'.

When she pleaded with him to return home, the boy refused, stating that he knew his father hated him and wanted to kill him. **ii)** A male homosexual interviewed at 37 years of age. When the boy was born, the father left saying that he would not share his home with another male. However, a daughter 3 years older than the son was no problem. Later, the boy went to live in a small town nearby and often saw the father who never greeted or acknowledged him. Despite such rejection, the boy called him on Christmas to wish him well, but the father never responded a word.⁸

In the light of such findings, Bieber states: "A boy who becomes homosexual leaves childhood with a profound fear and hatred of the father, yet has an overweening desire for paternal affection and acceptance. We have never interviewed a male homosexual whose father openly loved and respected him. We have repeatedly stated and written that a boy whose father is warmly related and constructive will not become homosexual; however, one must not get trapped by the fallacy of the converse, that is, a hostile, destructive father always produces a homosexual son".⁹ It happens sometimes that a parent of a homosexual client dies during the therapy period. It is observed that if it is the mother who dies, the client feels intense grief and sense of loss; if it is the father who dies, he feels disregard and at times regret of having no more opportunity for reconciliation.¹⁰

iii) On the basis of her careful clinical study of 106 individuals, New York-based psychiatry professor Cornelia Wilbur notes the following regarding the early development of male homosexuals: 'Each parent has a unique relationship with a homosexual son that differs significantly from their relationship with other children. The father is passive and indifferent to the boy and fails to inculcate male roles in him. If the parents enjoy stable love relationship with one another, homosexuality in a male child of theirs is unusual. Regarding female homosexuals, the mother is usually a domineering figure in the family and highly controlling in her relationship with the daughter. There is often power struggle between the mother and homosexual daughter, and often the daughter

⁸ Bieber, *Male Homosexuality*, 411

⁹ Bieber, *Male Homosexuality*, 410-411

¹⁰ Bieber, *Male Homosexuality*, 411

'loses'. Their fathers are perceived to be ineffective and detached'. If a child has a good relationship with a sibling, the chances of an eventual homosexual orientation are considerably reduced.¹¹ iv) In a reputed study of 'the interpersonal dynamics of gay person's family of origin' A.P. Bell and team collected and compared data from 979 homosexual men and women with data from 477 heterosexuals. Main findings: boys and girls who do not accommodate to the common conception of maleness and femaleness are more likely to become homosexuals. Close-binding relationship to mothers was not found significant for male homosexuality in this study, but boys' perception of their fathers as cool and distant mattered. The mothers of homosexual men were rather dominant over their fathers (i.e. husbands). In this study, the relationship of homosexual women with their fathers appeared to be unrelated to their homosexuality. But these women had rather poor relationship with their mothers. Most of the subjects in this study reported having had homoerotic feelings about three years before beginning same-sex physical intimacy. Further, all homosexuals in this study had some heterosexual experiences but found them mostly unrewarding.¹²

Thus Freudian theory assigns three causes to male homosexuality. a) close-binding relationship with the mother, b) rejection by, and fear of, the father, and c) domineering mother and 'fear of females'; a and b may occur together in the same case and c is a less discussed issue today.¹³

Observations

a) Regarding Freudian theory it is observed: "For the most part, there was no evidence, we just have to trust that Freud's insights were correct. It is not that they have been proven wrong; it is just that there is no good reason to think they are right".¹⁴ It is true that clinical interactions and unconscious dynamics cannot be subjected to controlled empirical investigation; but then it should also be acknowledged that the human

¹¹ Cfr. Ruth and Lopater, *Human Sexuality*, 297

¹² Cfr. Ruth and Lopater, *Human Sexuality*, 299

¹³ Cfr. Joseph Nicolosi, *Reparative Therapy of Male Homosexuality*, Jason Aronson Inc., New Jersey, 1997, 18

¹⁴ Le Vay, *Gay, Straight and the Reason*, 33

psyche and its operations are more than what can be gauged by empirical search alone. One cannot simply ignore the clinical success it has achieved in many cases¹⁵. **b)** According to psychoanalytic theory, homosexuality, especially male homosexuality, which it has studied more, is a disorder of sexual development due to faulty parent-child and family relationships, that is, psycho-social factors.¹⁶ It holds that homosexuality is 'changeable'/curable, and calls the dictum "once a homosexual, always a homosexual" a destructive myth.¹⁷ **c)** However, Freudian theory does not adequately explain homosexuality; female homosexuality has been practically ignored. Its tenet of cross-gender identification does not appear on the scene in the case of girls. If at all, it is the negative relationship with a domineering mother that plays some role in lesbianism. Besides, as seen in cases iii and iv above, findings of studies are not quite consistent. And its claim to be able to heal/change all homosexuality is not supported by clinical evidence.

II.2. Behaviourist Explanation

Another major psychological theory that tries to explain homosexuality is Behaviourism, the best known within a group of theories known as 'Learning Theories'. According to Behaviourism, all behaviours are learned, and we ourselves are shaped, by rewards and punishments. We tend to repeat the behaviours that are rewarded (reinforced) and they become strongly embedded in the person, while punished behaviours are suppressed. Sexual orientation is also a product of such learning.

What is crucial here is the sex of the first person with whom one happens to have sexual contact/relationship and the nature of the first experience – pleasure or pain- together with the consistency with which this occurs for some time. If the first sexual contact and relation (not necessarily bodily sexual union always) of a person is with a partner of the opposite sex, and the relationship happens to be a painful experience - repugnant, unpleasant, shameful, guilty, etc., - this creates in the person aversion for the opposite sex and paves the way for homosexuality. If

¹⁵ "Homosexuality and Hope", Statement of the Catholic Medical Association, 4; Cfr. J. Nicolosi, *Reparative Therapy*, 18 ff, 149 ff.

¹⁶ I. Bieber, *Sexual Deviations*, II: Homosexuality, p.970

¹⁷ 'Homosexuality and Hope', 4, 2005, p.4

subsequent experiences with the opposite sex also become unpleasant, it drives him to homosexuality. On the contrary, if the first sexual contact of a person with another happens to be pleasant - pleasurable, positive, satisfying, etc. - and it is reinforced subsequently by similar experiences, the person becomes a heterosexual if the partner was of the opposite sex; the person becomes homosexual if the partner was of the same sex. Thus, a person who initially had no special sexual preference, through repeated pleasurable contacts with one of the sexes, develops preference for that sex; if the experiences were painful, there develops preference for the other sex.¹⁸ Once stabilized, change is not easy. The norms are applicable also to childhood sexual play - between members of the same sex or opposite sexes - which are scolded or punished by parents. It is even claimed that a sole early act can be strengthened and kept alive by associated pleasurable fantasies and feelings aroused by intermittent autoerotic practices, like masturbation.

Two popular beliefs seem to be congruent with this theory: 'girls molested by men become lesbians' and 'molestation by older men makes boys homosexual'. It is quite likely that since girls tend to perceive bodily contacts and molestation by men as very menacing and frightening, such experiences are likely to lead them to sex with girls/women. On the contrary, many boys may perceive such experiences as more pleasurable than menacing, seek further relations with boys/men and become homosexuals.

There are also certain findings considered to be supporting this view. v) In a study on childhood/ adolescence sexual experiences by T. Templar and team, it was found that homosexuals of both sexes had more sexual contacts with same-sexed persons than heterosexuals of both sexes. Another study, by Wilson and Widom, focused on the influence of childhood sexual abuse on adult sexual orientation. Significantly more sexually abused male children than non-abused male children tended to form homosexual partnerships in adulthood. But such differences were not found between abused and non-abused female children.¹⁹

However, the view that the experience of early sexual relation and the sex of the partner basically determine one's ultimate sexual orientation

¹⁸ Ruth and Lopater, *Human Sexuality*, 398

¹⁹ Cfr. Le Vay, *Gay, Straight and the Reason*, 34, 385, 390

is criticized on various counts. First, it presumes that children/adolescents are simply passive objects in sexual relation or even molestation. At least adolescents are aware of their sexual orientation and if they welcome or tolerate homosexual contacts it must be because they were already attracted to the same sex, and not that same-sex contact made them homosexual. Then, in certain cultures (e.g. in Sambia of New Guinea) boys are required to engage in sexual contacts with older male youths for several years before they have access to females, and almost all of those boys later become heterosexuals. Third, it is generally known that homosexual behavior is common among children and adolescents residing in single-sex boardings and hostels. If it made them homosexual, then the number of homosexuals should have been many-fold higher than the present figures.²⁰

Gender learning and sexual orientation

Another way of learning theory to homosexuality is via gender learning. Gender refers to 'the mental set and behavioural traits that differ, to a greater or lesser degree, between males and females'. For example, boys are active, even aggressive, engage more in rough- and-tumble play, prefer toys of vehicles, weapons, construction materials and are thing-oriented, and these are considered to be proper for or typical of boys and masculine gender. Girls on the contrary are rather quite, prefer dolls, toys of household/kitchen articles, interested in infants and are person-oriented, which are supposed to be typical of girls and feminine gender. Such (more or less) gender-specific traits are called 'gendered traits'.²¹ Psycho-social sciences hold that gendered traits and differences are learned and exist in all cultures though there might be certain variation. They are learned directly when parents reward their sons for engaging in behaviours expected of males and punish contrary ones, and reward their daughters for behaviours appropriate to females and punish contrary ones. They are further reinforced when children take more active role in imitating same-sex role models, acquire more gendered characteristics and gradually establish their gender identity.

The theory holds that a person's sexual orientation is also part of the process of gender learning. A child, whether boy or girl, will be heterosexual

²⁰ Le Vay, *Gay, Straight and the Reason*, 35

²¹ Cfr. Le Vay, *Gay, Straight and the Reason*, 37

if he/she has acquired the traits typical of him/ her (masculine traits for boys and feminine traits for girls). The child will be homosexual if he/she has acquired atypical traits, i.e. boys acquiring feminine traits and girls acquiring masculine traits. Such boys and girls are popularly called sissies and tomboys, respectively. Against this theory, arguments are raised on the basis of certain psycho-medical findings.

vi) Bruce Reimer was a normal boy, but he suffered the destruction of his penis during a botched circumcision procedure when he was 7 months old. A medical expert told the parents that such a young boy would not yet have acquired a definitive gender or sexual identity and advised the parents to have his testicles also removed, give prescribed medicines, and raise him as a girl. They did so and Bruce became Brenda. She then developed girlish characteristics, people accepted her as a girl and things appeared to go well. But gradually she began to detest her female features like bodily softness, breast growth, etc. Upon her demand she was converted back to a male and became David. As an adult, David was attracted to women, contrary to the prediction of the experts who first advised to change Bruce into Brenda. (Unfortunately, David later committed suicide). Apparently, despite physiological interventions and psycho-social support, Bruce never truly accepted a female identity, though it was maintained for several years.²² vii) Similarly, medical experts at John Hopkins Medical College pursued 14 male children who were reassigned as female when they were babies because they did not have functional penis due to severe congenital malformations of the pelvic area. As they grew up most of these individuals chose to revert to the male sex, and those who were asked about their sexual orientation reported that they were attracted to females.²³

Such findings seem to show that developing sexual orientation and learning gender identity are not identical processes and that there might be deeper processes affecting sexual orientation than social learning.

Observations

a) Behaviourist approach provides the simplest etiology. Its basic principles of reward and punishment are well-established and generally

²² Le Vay, *Gay, Straight and the Reason*, 38.

²³ Le Vay, *Gay, Straight and the Reason*, 39

accepted and to that extent its application to the acquisition of homosexuality is valid. But one wonders whether the several variations of homosexuality that exist are acquired through corresponding reinforcement schedules alone. Behaviourism's simplicity is its liability too. **b)** The theory fails to respond to critics' observation that very many homosexuals feel homoerotic desires and interest much before they engage in any homosexual act. We feel the reason for this failure is that behaviourism does not have a 'psychological theory' on homosexuality as psychoanalysis has; it only accounts for how homosexual acts can be strengthened by reinforcements and made part of one's behavior pattern and contrary acts suppressed by punishments.

II.3. Biological Approach

A prominent and systematic contemporary proponent of the biological approach is Simon Le Vay²⁴, an American neuroanatomist, to whom we have already referred several times. He considers homosexuality as "part of a 'package' of mental traits"²⁵, especially gendered traits (more or less gender-specific traits, as explained earlier). The traits one possesses may be largely gender-typical (conventionally expected of the gender/sex of the person, like certain aggressiveness in a boy or softness in a girl) or gender-atypical (conventionally unexpected of the gender/sex of the person, like doll-preference of a boy or gun-preference of a girl).

Le Vay holds that homosexuality reflects already in childhood and so adult homosexuality is linked to childhood homosexual symptoms. Children with such symptoms are called pre-gay or pre-lesbian children. Sexual orientation, together with several related gendered traits, appears in the child already when it is about 3 years of age, though the child is not aware of it and parents/adults themselves may not notice or identify it. Pre-gay boys and pre-lesbian girls show gender- *atypical* traits (i.e. boys will show girlish traits and girls will show boyish traits). But pre-heterosexual boys and girls will show gender - *typical* traits (i.e. traits proper to each one's sex/gender). That is, homosexual boys and girls

²⁴ For the biological approach we draw mainly from the earlier mentioned book of Le Vay, which reviews many studies on the topic, particularly those from a biological perspective.

²⁵ LeVay, *Gay, Straight and the Reason*, 73

show a certain shift towards the opposite sex. Besides those already mentioned, Le Vay refers to several other psycho-physical gendered traits: finger length (index finger of men is a little shorter), hypothalamus size, auditory physiology, mental rotation (ability to discern between 2-dimensional and 3-dimensional drawings from different angles), memory, verbal fluency, hip-waist ratio, body-odour, mechanical interests, occupational preferences, empathy, expressiveness, etc. In all these, homosexuals will show certain shift to the levels/styles of the opposite sex.²⁶ The emergence/adoption of a particular class of traits – gender-typical or gender-atypical – by a person is influenced by biological factors, mainly hormones, genes and brain-anatomy, which are therefore also at the basis of homosexuality.

Hormonal Influence

It is known that the presence, absence and amounts of sex hormones, especially male hormone testosterone and female hormone estrogen, during embryonic development have serious consequences for the person and his functioning from the sexual/gender point of view. For example, for a genetic male (who has XY sex-chromosomes), to develop the appropriate internal and external genitourinary system testosterone must be present. But for a genetic female (who has XX sex-chromosomes) to develop her appropriate genitourinary system no sex hormones can be present.²⁷ Against this background, scientists wondered whether adult homosexuals had typical levels of normal sex hormones -testosterone in men and estrogen in women. They made several studies, controlled studies and analysis of natural occurrences ('experiments of nature'). No study up to now is reported to have come up with clear/consistent evidence that adult "male and female homosexuals are abnormal in any hormonal sense"²⁸ in comparison to heterosexuals. However there are indications of hormonal involvement at the fetal stage in the etiology of homosexuality, as discussed below.

²⁶ Le Vay, *Gay, Straight and the Reason*, 275-276

²⁷ R. K. Westheimer and S. Lopater, *Human Sexuality, A Psycho-Social Perspective*, 294. However, Le Vay observes that testosterone plays some role in the development of female genitals, *Gay, Straight and the Reason*, 133

²⁸ Ruth and Lopater, *Human Sexuality*, 94; Le Vay, *Gay, Straight and the Reason*, 130-131

Le Vay suggests that testosterone, the male and masculinizing hormone, is the key player. The basic principle is: if a male fetus in the mother's womb happens to be exposed to lower than normal level of testosterone (under-masculinization), there is likelihood of the person born from that fetus becoming a gay; if a female fetus in the mother's womb happens to be exposed to higher than normal level of testosterone ²⁹(over-masculinization), there is likelihood of the person becoming a lesbian.

The following are some of the findings³⁰ supporting this.viii) Congenital adrenal hyperplasia (CAH) is a disease caused by a genetic mutation, resulting in the secretion of higher-than-normal levels of testosterone by the adrenal glands. If it happens, it does shortly before birth. Since it is male hormone, excess exposure to it as a rule does not cause special problem to male fetus. But excess exposure to it can cause problem to female fetus. It was found that in severe cases of CAH, females' genitals were partially masculinized. Besides, later it made them more active and aggressive, engage in rough-and-tumble play and prefer boys' toys (male-typical traits). That is, prenatal overexposure to testosterone has a masculinization effect on females.ix) A research team in City of London University approached the issue by measuring testosterone levels in the blood of several hundred pregnant mothers and then studying the children born from those pregnancies. (Maternal testosterone level gives some idea of the testosterone levels to which the fetus is exposed). Among the girls that were born of those pregnancies and followed up at 3 years of age, it was found: the higher the testosterone levels, the more masculine were the girls' gendered traits. Further, these traits did not appear to be affected by socialization factors like male model, modeling efforts, etc.x) More recently, the same university team measured testosterone levels in amniotic fluid and checked its bearing on sexual orientation. It was again found that higher testosterone levels were related to more masculine play behavior in both girls and boys.³¹

²⁹ Remember that testosterone (male hormone) and estrogen (female hormone) are produced in both men and women and influence their sexual features; of course, testosterone more in men and estrogen more in women.

³⁰ Le Vay refers to many studies in the context of discussing his proposals/hypotheses, including animal studies. It is practically impossible to review them all here nor is it needed. We have chosen a sample of studies on human beings.

³¹ Le Vay, *Gay, Straight and the Reason*, 80-81

But there have been also contrary findings: **xi**) boys affected by CAH performed worse at mental rotation task (on which boys are normally better than girls) than non-CAH boys, while with extra dose of testosterone the former should have done better.**xii**) It is supposed that a girl who shares the same uterus simultaneously with a boy (e.g. fraternal twins) is exposed to more prenatal testosterone (than other girls) because of the presence of male fetus, and will show more masculine characteristics. However, two studies on gender- related traits in such girls failed to support the hypothesis or yielded mixed results. In the light of diverse results, Le Vay observes that prenatal hormonal level influences several gendered traits, but the influence is not so simple and clear cut, and needs more precise investigations³².

Retrospective studies: **xiii**) Boys who were homosexuals are more likely than other boys to feel anxiety and depression in adulthood and seek psychiatric help. And psychiatrists report from their practice that their gay clients often speak of having been gender-nonconforming (gender-atypical) in their childhood. Some hold that gender non-conformity in childhood is predictive of homosexuality in adulthood, though this is clearer in the case of boys than girls. However, since most of those studies were necessarily retrospective and there could very well have been 'memory losses' and confusion showing their reliability is suspect.**xiv**) A team made a recent effort to make such a study by using home videos possessed by people. They recruited gay and straight men and women who had videos of themselves as children. Clippings were made out of them and were shown to judges, who did not know the sexual orientations of the subjects. But they rated pre-gay children as far more gender-nonconformist than straight children. The differences between pre-gay and pre-straight seem to appear about 3 years of age and then increase in the next few years ³³.

There have been prospective studies as well. They consist in recruiting and assessing (through interviews, parental reports, etc.) children's present liking for their biological sex and following them up into adulthood and checking their sexual orientation then.**xv**) Richard Green of UCLA

³² Le Vay, *Gay, Straight and the Reason*, 78-81

³³ Le Vay, *Gay, Straight and the Reason*, 83-88

recruited 66 feminine boys (who did not like their male sex and some even wanted to become girls) and 56 control group (heterosexual) boys. Of the 56 control group boys, Green was able to follow up 35 and all of them were heterosexual. Of the 66 feminine boys, Green was able to followup 44, of whom 33 (75%) were homosexual or bisexual and 11 (25%) were heterosexual. The difference was significant, but still 25% turned out to be, contrary to expectation, heterosexual. A surprising finding was that one of the feminine boys, who highly disliked his male sex and wanted very much to become a girl, became heterosexual as an adult. Summarizing the findings of several such studies LeVay observes that pre-gay children are gender- nonconformist (when compared with pre-straight children), but the future sexual orientation of a boy or girl cannot be predicted with certainty from such atypical characteristics ³⁴.

Regarding hormonal influence on adult sexual orientation there are certain findings which are inconclusive. **xvi)** The CAH women, discussed earlier, showed shift towards masculine direction in sexual orientation. According to findings of several studies on CAH women, those most severely affected by the disease showed most marked shift in sexual orientation in the masculine direction; but this was only a moderate shift, though significant. A surprising finding was that while only 6 out of the 39 CAH women were out and out lesbian, 18 were exclusively heterosexual. This shows that though prenatal testosterone levels may be influencing sexual orientation, they by themselves do not determine sexual orientation. ³⁵ **xvii)** Androgen insensitivity syndrome (AIS) is a condition in which the gene coding for the androgen receptor (the molecule that senses the presence of testosterone and other androgens) is mutated, giving rise to a receptor that functions poorly or not at all. This condition causes the male fetuses, who should have become normal males, to develop with the outward appearance of females, because their bodies simply do not respond to the testosterone that is being secreted by their testes. When born, these children naturally look like girls, are reared as girls and they identify themselves as girls. In adulthood, they are psychosexually similar to other women, and great majority are sexually attracted to men and are feminine in other gender traits. This

³⁴ Le Vay, *Gay, Straight and the Reason*, 92

³⁵ Le Vay, *Gay, Straight and the Reason*, 134-136

finding shows that testosterone is a key biological player in the development of sexual orientation and gender, because male fetuses (having xy chromosomes) who should have become men appeared and developed as females owing to lack of functional androgen receptor. At the same time, here there is a problem. From birth on these children had been subjected to consistent female/feminine socialization processes and practices. Therefore, it is difficult to tell between the effects of nature and nurture on the sexual orientation and gender identity of these women; hence also the weak probative value of the findings. xviii) Meyer-Bahlburg of Columbia University reviewed studies done up to 1984 comparing the serum testosterone levels in gay and straight men, but found no consistent difference between testosterone levels in gay and straight men; the findings regarding lesbians and straight women were also similar. Today there appears to be a consensus that gay and straight adults have similar testosterone levels ³⁶, which we noted earlier in another context. So, the critical role of hormone level influencing/ predisposing one's sexual orientation seems to be confined to the fetal stage.

Role of Genes

Another point of biological approach is the role of genes in homosexuality. There is indication of a genetic influence on the etiology of homosexuality. The following are three important studies in this regard. xix) Twin study is the reliable method usually used for checking the heritability of a trait. Comparison is made between identical twin pairs who have the same genes (because they come from the same fertilized ovum or zygote) and fraternal twins whose genes are roughly 50% the same (because they come from two different zygotes). Researchers recruit subjects (who are called 'index subjects') who are gay and are members of twin pairs. Then they ascertain the sexual orientation of the other member (co-twin) of each pair. The percentage of co-twins who are also gay/lesbian is known as 'concordance rate'. If homosexuality were completely determined by genes, the concordance rate for identical twins would be 100% while that for fraternal twins would be nearly 50%. Besides, close relatives like cousins, nephews, etc., also will show closer concordance rate than unrelated persons. Twin studies conducted

³⁶ Le Vay, *Gay, Straight and the Reason*, 130-131, 137

in early 1990s by Bailey and team showed concordance rates of about 50% for homosexuality in identical twins of both sexes and about 20% in fraternal twins of both sexes, a significant difference. This shows certain influence of genes on homosexuality. At the same time, that the concordance rate for identical twins is only about 50%, and not 100%, means there are other equally strong influential factor(s). Some of the subsequent studies showed higher concordance rates, while some others yielded lower rates³⁷.

Boston University psychiatrist R. Pillard is himself gay, has a gay brother, a lesbian sister and a bisexual daughter. This family situation motivated him (and his team) to investigate possible genetic link of homosexuality.xx) They recruited homosexual and straight subjects ('index subjects') who had siblings, and then ascertained the sexual orientation of the siblings through interview with them or reports from index subjects. Findings: homosexual men and women have more homosexual siblings than do heterosexual men and women. In his early study (1980s), it was found that about 22% of the brothers of gay men were reportedly gay or bisexual, compared with about 4% of the brothers of straight men. As for women, about 25% of the sisters of the lesbian women were reportedly lesbian or bisexual, compared with about 11% of the sisters of straight women. Subsequent studies by the team yielded results along the same line, but the degree of clustering of homosexuals was less or thinner. Only 7% to 16% of the same-sex siblings of homosexuals were found to be homosexual.³⁸

Freudians would say that homosexuality running in families is not due to genes but faulty family relationships. In such a family there must be close-binding relationship between the mother and a couple of sons, and perhaps also their rejection by the father. Besides, if an older son thus became homosexual, he might become an influential model to a younger one(s) with whom he might be close for some reason or other.

xxi) In another study, D.H. Hammer and team isolated five markers (specific characteristics shown by a gene, whose location in a

³⁷ Le Vay, *Gay, Straight and the Reason*, 162-164; Westheimer and Lopater, *Human Sexuality*, 292

³⁸ Le Vay, *Gay, Straight and the Reason*, 157-158

chromosome is known) on the X-sex chromosome (Xq28),³⁹ which suggested a possible maternal genetic influence on male homosexuality. To investigate the issue, they chose 2 samples of subjects: 76 men were recruited from an HIV clinic and 38 pairs of gay brothers who volunteered to join the research programme. The subjects' homosexual orientation was ascertained through questionnaires and interviews. Findings: among the subjects recruited from HIV clinic, there was a higher incidence of homosexual *maternal male relatives* than homosexual *paternal male relatives*. Besides, 33 of the pairs of gay brothers all had the same five markers on the X-sex chromosome. This finding made big news of a 'gay-gene' in the popular media in the 1990s, which was an exaggeration. What the study indicated was the 'possibility of a location on the X-sex chromosome that may in some way be related to male homosexuality'.⁴⁰ The data so far are more suggestive for male than female homosexuality. Because of several methodological issues, the research team itself felt that the issue required further exploration. However, further attempts by G. Rice and team to replicate Hammer's findings have not succeeded. According to Le Vay, such studies are pointers to future research rather than actual identification of regions containing 'gay genes'.⁴¹

Brain Structure and Homosexuality

Le Vay says that all mental traits, including sexual orientation have some durable, i.e., structural (involving neurons, synapses, molecules, etc.) representations, not only functional patterns. Finding the origin of such representations is not easy⁴². In fact it was Le Vay himself who in 1991 reported first in recent times about such a brain structure, considered to be related to sexual orientation. It is known in neuro-psychology that a tiny portion in the brain known as hypothalamus regulates several vital functions like eating, drinking, emotions and sexual behavior in animals and man.

³⁹ Le Vay, *Gay Straight and the Reason*, 171. A gene is a piece of DNA (deoxyribonucleic acid) on the long strand of DNA contained in a chromosome. Note also that the X-sex chromosome (of the 23rd pair) in a male is inherited from the mother; the one inherited from the father is the Y-sex chromosome in the male.

⁴⁰ Ruth and Lopater, *Human Sexuality*, 292

⁴¹ Le Vay, *Gay, Straight and the Reason*, 172. ⁴² Le Vay, *Gay, Straight and the Reason*, 191

xxii) In his study Le Vay found that a cluster of brain cells named 'third interstitial nucleus of the anterior hypothalamus (INAH3) is normally about two to three times larger in men than in women. But in a comparative study of the hypothalamus of gay men (all of whom had died of AIDS) and straight men (of whom some had died of AIDS and others of other diseases) it was found that on average the INAH3 was significantly smaller in homosexual men than in straight men. It was almost as small as the hypothalamus of women. This made another piece of hot news that homosexuality was brain-based. Some critics pointed out that the decrease in the size of hypothalamus must have been an effect of AIDS of which they had died. But Le Vay answered that there was no difference in the size of hypothalamus of the heterosexual men in his study who also had died of AIDS. In a replication attempt by neuroscientist William Byne it was found that the hypothalamus of gays was of intermediate size between the average for straight men and women. But this difference in the size was not statistically significant and hence Le Vay's findings still remain unreplicated.⁴³Reportedly, hypothalamus-based investigation is not much pursued today.

Observations

For lack of space, we limit to a few general observations. a) Le Vay's attempts to study the possible biological origins of homosexuality are laudable. For example, in *Gay, Straight and the Reason* he musters so many empirical studies, including his own, extensively argues in support of his hypotheses, though at the end he also acknowledges the insufficiency of the findings to provide clear proof or evidence, and admits possible role of environmental factors. Overall presentation smacks of certain biologism, reminding us of the reductionist tendency of contemporary psycho-biologists. "Like all well-bred scientists, biologically oriented scientists in the field of sexual orientation dutifully murmur the mandatory mantra that correlation is not cause. But the reductive temptation of biological causation is so seductive that the caveat cannot possibly compete with the excitement of discovering yet another link between the anatomy of our brains and the anatomy of our lover's genitalia. Unfortunately, the caveat vanishes completely as word of the

⁴³ Le Vay, *Gay, Straight and the Reason*, 198, 199

latest discovery moves from *Science* to *Newsweek*”⁴⁴ Though this particular citation is about biologists, reductionism, which is opposed to scientific openness, is a temptation of several theories/theorists and should be detested by all. **b)** A basic principle in psychology is that interaction between nature and nurture (or the individual and the environment) is a key factor in the development of any dimension or trait of a person, especially psychosocial traits. Sexual orientation, which Le Vay qualifies as a ‘mental attitude’, is definitely a psychosocial trait. Normally it does not develop and flower unless stimulated by interpersonal interactions. But this is not sufficiently recognized in the biological approach. Besides, most of the gendered traits reckoned together with sexual orientation are bodily (e.g. body weight, finger length) or intellectual (memory, mental rotation) while sexual orientation is very much interpersonal and affective. Though prenatal hormonal levels affect these traits in some way, putting them all into one package ignoring significant differences among them is anomalous. Homosexuals themselves sometimes complain that insistence on gendered traits and their biological basis ‘medicalize’ homosexuality (making it a sort of psychiatric issue).

c) Le Vay frequently refers to findings from animal studies (which we have not included in the article). It is true that human embryonic development has several similarities (e.g. influence of prenatal hormone levels) to that of several subhuman species. But it does not mean that the impact of such hormonal influences on later behavior of humans and animals would be equally similar. Animal sex and human sexuality are not the same. For example, sexual behavior of animals is largely controlled by hormones and they have no free choice in it. On the contrary, human sexual behavior, though influenced by hormones to some extent, is largely open to personal control and choice. Besides, in human sexuality there is not only eros but also love.

d) Regarding biological basis of homosexuality – *Genes*: No ‘gay/lesbian gene’ has been known or identified so far. However, studies on identical twins, siblings and ‘gene markers’ (cases xix-xxi) indicate some genetic influence on homosexuality. Its nature and details require further studies. *Brain Structure*: Le Vay found the hypothalamus of male

⁴⁴ Daryl Bem, *Exotic Becomes Erotic*, *Psychological Review*, 1996 (vol. 103), 330

homosexuals to be smaller than that of heterosexuals (case xxii). But an attempt to replicate the finding did not succeed. *Hormones*: Findings of several studies show a relationship between the level of testosterone to which a fetus is exposed and homosexuality. Exposure to lower than normal level seems to dispose a male fetus to homosexuality, and higher than normal level seems to dispose a female fetus to homosexuality (cases viii-xviii, several of which support hormone influence while some do not or yield contrary findings). More light needs to be shed on the mode of influence, normal level of the hormone, critical period of exposure, etc.

II.4. Exotic Becomes Erotic (EBE) Theory

Among major theories, this is the latest, systematically proposed in 1996 by psychologist D. Bem.⁴⁵ In this theory too, the concept of sex-typical and sex-atypical, with which we are already familiar, is significant. The following is a summary of the theory. 'Biological factors like genes and hormones do not directly cause or influence the sexual orientation of a child; but they influence the temperaments of a child. A child's temperaments predispose him/ her to enjoy some activities more than others. Some children enjoy male-typical activities (e.g. rough-and-tumble play) and others enjoy female-typical activities (e.g. smooth play). Children also prefer to play with peers who share their activity preferences. Children who prefer sex-typical activities and same-sex playmates are called *gender-conforming*, children who prefer sex-atypical activities and opposite-sex playmates are called *gender-nonconforming*. Gender-conforming children will feel different from opposite-sex members (e.g. normal boys vs. normal girls), perceiving them as dissimilar, unfamiliar and exotic. Similarly gender-nonconforming children will feel different, even alienated, from same-sex peers (e.g. sissy boys vs. normal boys or tomboy girls vs. normal girls), perceiving them as dissimilar, unfamiliar and exotic. Instances of sissy boys being teased and taunted by male peers and tomboy girls fooled and alienated by female peers must be familiar to all. These feelings of dissimilarity produce heightened autonomous arousal. The male-typical child may feel this as antipathy or contempt in the presence of girls, and the female-typical child may feel this as timidity or apprehension in the presence of

⁴⁵ Daryl J. Bem, 'Exotic Becomes Erotic: A developmental theory of sexual orientation' *Psychological Review*, 1996 (vol. 103, no. 2), 320-335. Henceforth, EBE.

boys. The theory holds that every child, conforming or nonconforming, experiences heightened nonspecific autonomous arousal in the presence of peers from whom he/she feels different. The arousal will not necessarily be affectively toned or consciously felt. Irrespective of the specific source or affective tone of the childhood autonomic arousal, it is transformed in later years into erotic/romantic attraction.⁴⁶

That is, biological factors like hormones and genes influence the child's temperament which predisposes it to gender conformity or nonconformity. Gender conformity causes a child to perceive opposite-sex peers as exotic; gender nonconformity causes a child to perceive same-sex peers as exotic. The exotic peers generate high arousal (excitement involving increased pulse, BP, respiration, etc., as felt when exercising or in an emotion). This arousal is later transformed into romantic/erotic attraction and sexual orientation.

EBE theory, like the biological approach, links homosexuality to biology, but with a significant difference. The biological approach presumes direct influence of biological factors (or fails to indicate any intermediary factors) while EBE links homosexuality to biology through one's temperament. Temperament refers to the 'rather stable emotional reactivity of an individual'. It is understood to express itself mainly in one's sociability (extroversion-introversion), emotionality (excitable-calm), activity level (dynamic-passive) and aggressiveness (rough and aggressive – gentle and peaceful). Individuals differ on these traits and their combinations. Hence, people are of different temperaments. Already newborns noticeably exhibit several of these traits (e.g. a very agile and hardly sleeping infant vs. a calm and soundly sleeping infant). Hence temperaments are considered to be largely inborn and influenced by prenatal hormones.⁴⁷ Now it should be clear that certain combinations of the above temperamental traits can make a boy or a girl gender-conforming or nonconforming. The protracted period of feeling different from same- or opposite-sex peers during childhood and adolescence produces a stable sexual orientation for most individuals. And within that orientation there can be wide-ranging and changing idiosyncratic

⁴⁶ Bem, EBE, 321

⁴⁷ H. Friedman and M. Schustack, *Personality: Classic Theories and Modern Research*, Pearson Education, Delhi, 2009, 165-166

preferences for particular partners or kinds of partners. Thus Bem provides room for sufficient variety within the class of homosexuality.⁴⁸

The main empirical support for the theory comes from 'San Francisco Study', a large scale interview study conducted by A.P.Bell and team in 1981. **xxiii)** They compared nearly 1000 homosexual men and women with 500 heterosexual men and women. The focus of the study was the relationship between gender-nonconformity in childhood and adult homosexuality. Gender-nonconformity was assessed by childhood dislike for sex-typical activities, liking for sex-atypical activities and friendship with members of the opposite sex. It was found: 63% of gays had disliked sex-typical activities in their childhood while only 10% of straight men had disliked them. Among lesbians also, 63% had disliked sex-typical activities as children while only 15% of straight women did so. Further, 48% of gays enjoyed sex-atypical activities as children while only 11% of straight men did so. Among lesbians, 81% had enjoyed boys' activities in childhood while only 61% of straight women did so. Regarding friendship, 42% gays had mostly opposite-sex friends while only 13% straight men had so. 60% of lesbians had mostly opposite-sex friends while only 40% straight women had so. Similar findings have been obtained in several other studies too.⁴⁹ Empirical findings show, as EBE theory claims, a connection between childhood gender-nonconformity and adult homosexuality in men and women.

Further Dynamics

Various psychological processes are invoked to explain the transfer and transformation of childhood (unpleasant) arousal into erotic attraction in adulthood. Through 'stimulus generalization' the arousal generated by exotic experience in childhood revives and gets associated to similar situations (i.e. same-sex encounters) in adulthood. This arousal becomes erotic through a process called "extrinsic arousal effect" according to which a physiologically aroused individual will show heightened sexual responsiveness to appropriate object. **xxiv)** For example, a few male participants in a study ran a couple of rounds and were physiologically aroused. Then they were given opportunity to interact with an attractive woman, after which their interest and response regarding her

⁴⁸ D. Bem, EBE, 324

⁴⁹ D.Bem, EBE, 322

attractiveness, sexiness, desire to date her, etc. were assessed. It was found that these participants were clearly more erotically responsive to the woman than members of a control group who had not run the rounds or aroused. There are also other studies with similar findings. The conclusion is that arousal, irrespective of its source, increases the feeling of sexual attraction provided there is a suitable stimulus, in this case, the attractive woman. (In principle, a physiological arousal can be turned into any emotion like anger or fear by 'cognitive appraisal' provided appropriate stimulus is presented). Bem argues that the arousal experienced by exotic (and complementary) partners will be similarly transformed into erotic attraction. Another mechanism involved is the "opposite process" reaction. The sympathetic nervous system operates behind physiological arousal. When one has felt a negative affect or stress for a long time, he gets used to it and the parasympathetic system tries to restore a balance and bring about a congenial/pleasurable state. This is meant to restore the homeostasis of the organism and known as 'parasympathetic rebound'. After reaching the verge of exhaustion, a runner gradually getting relaxed and beginning to 'feel high' or an overly disturbed initial parachutist feeling euphoria later, etc., are 'opponent process' reactions. Similarly, the negative arousal of a gender-nonconforming boy daunted by peers, with repeated interactions over time, gets habituated and through opponent process becomes erotic arousal in encounters with same-sex partners in adulthood.⁵⁰

Observations

a) EBE is a broad-based theory which admits the role of biological basis, temperament, psychosocial influences and naturally individual variations in them all. It has good explanatory potential in regard to variety and variations of homosexuality. b) But its problem is lack of empirical support. Though there is some support for the link between childhood gender-nonconformity and adult homosexuality, there is hardly any evidence to show that childhood arousal is actually transformed into adult erotic attraction through the conjoint operation of the various processes Bem has proposed. As Ruth observes, "This is one of the more interesting and fruitful theories of sexual orientation to be introduced

⁵⁰ Bem, EBE, 325-327

in many years, although it is too early to tell if the theory's basic claims will be supported by empirical evidence".⁵¹

III. Conclusion

The foregoing exposition, though not complete in all details, we believe, has amply shown that the etiology of homosexuality is complex and uncertain, though there are several good indications. By way of conclusion, we should like to suggest the following tentative classification of homosexuality in the light of supposed causes. 1) *Primary-Parental*: When homosexuality is influenced by biological/constitutional factors (directly or via temperament) we call it primary because biology seems to have a predisposing influence. However, actual emergence of homosexual orientation does seem to require the influence of psychosocial (environmental) factors which may come from different sources. In this model, the influence comes from the most significant, but faulty, relationship, i.e. parent-child relationship. A gender-atypical boy (biological factor) who is liked by his mother more than other sons because he is rather 'feminine', and disliked/ rejected by the father because he is not virile (parental factors), and the boy in turn getting strongly identified with the mother is a fit example. This model is likely to be the strongest type and very resistant to change. 2) *Primary-Social*: Here too there is biological influence. However, the environmental influence comes from non-parental sources like peer-interactions, particularly between gender-typical and gender-atypical individuals. This must be rather similar to the above in strength and resistance to change. 3) *Secondary-Parental*: Homosexuality without biological basis is secondary and there seem to be many such cases. They are products of deeply affecting psychosocial factors, primary one among which is faulty parental and family relationships. There can be serious cases depending on the gravity of disordered relationships, for example, seriously faulty relationship with both the parents. All the same, this category should be amenable to change through appropriate therapies. 4) *Secondary-Conditioned*: A homosexual can be shaped also by consistently reinforced same-sex behavior with youngsters, peers or elders. Here one progresses from actions to desire, attitude and finally orientation. This also should be open to therapeutic change.

⁵¹ Ruth and Lopater, *Human Sexuality*, 301

From the etiological perspective, there is no good reason at the present stage of our knowledge to state that all homosexuality is simply unchangeable or unhealable. Yet, any homosexuality, if strengthened by consistently reinforced practices for a long period, is likely to become highly resistant to change. Socio-cultural practices of encouraging, extolling and glorifying homosexuality also boost and strengthen it - a phenomenon in which cultures widely differ among themselves! Without abandoning the trodden paths of research, more comparative studies on the socio-cultural-familial situations prevailing in diverse societies and cultures and likely to affect the growth of sexual orientation, focusing on micro factors and processes, seem to be necessary for shedding more light on the etiology of homosexuality.

In fine, we close with two observations. **i)** The above etiological considerations do not advocate any discrimination against homosexuals. They should be treated as brothers and sisters with similar dignity and rights as heterosexuals. But one frequently hears talk about rights without due distinctions of that concept, particularly between rights and freedoms. **ii)** Extreme etiological stands - 'biological essentialism and social constructionism' - are to be avoided. Views like 'it is all natural' or 'it is all acquired' are one-side positions; the truth seems to be in a complex blending of the two. Diffusing misinformation and/or creating sensationalism about a matter which so vitally affects personal identity, family relationships and social wellbeing, to say the least, is grossly irresponsible.

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